nothing he can't endure

by Katbelle

Summary

Matt and Foggy deal with the aftermath of Matt's Veritaserum-induced word-vomit — or don't deal, as the case may be. Foggy launches a revenge plan against Stick with the help of his weird neighbour. Interesting family connections are made and discovered. In the meantime, Matt and Foggy deal with some of their other problems, or at least try to.

"The conversation," Matt clarifies. "I don't want to talk about it. It'll end up in a fight. I don't want to fight."

"So what, we're just going to pretend nothing happened and we don't have a fundamental disagreement on moral grounds? We're not going to talk? Just like the last time we fought?"

Notes

Written for this prompt over at the Daredevil kink meme. Also fills this prompt and incorporates elements of this one.
nothing he can’t endure

*Nothing happens to anyone that he can’t endure.*
Marcus Aurelius

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Matt cries himself into exhaustion.

Foggy could probably write a PhD thesis on the number of things *wrong* with that statement if he wanted to, but he doesn’t. Want to, that is. So, instead.

Foggy hugs Matt and just holds him, holds him, holds him and doesn’t let go.

And Matt cries himself into exhaustion in his arms.

The thing is, Matt is not the type of person to display his emotions. He feels everything very deeply, Foggy knows him well enough to know that, but it rarely shows. Matt keeps all his emotions close to him, never showing, never just *out* so that no one could use them against him. He considers being open about what and how he feels a weakness, consciously or not — and that’s another thing that Foggy knows, that he figured out about Matt over the years, and after last night, he rather thinks Matt doesn’t even know this about himself. Doesn’t realise just how damaged his whole perception of feelings is.

Foggy has known Matt for over five years now and in that time he’s seen Matt cry a grand total of two times. Both times in the past three months and both times because of Foggy, more or less.

The first time, That Day, when Foggy tore into him in his anger, used every tactic at his disposal to make Matt feel as raw and betrayed, to make Matt *hurt* as much as Foggy was hurting, when he aimed his words exactly in the right places, where he knew they’d land with a blow, where he knew they’d hurt. That was the first time, the very first time he’s seen Matt Murdock cry. Before then he wasn’t even sure Matt was physically capable of that.

Well, he was. The knowledge — and the memory of Matt’s expression — still twists at his insides, makes him feel sick.

And the second time, today, in the morning, after Foggy implied enough to make Matt realise just what he’d told Foggy the night before — what he’d admitted to when drugged, what he’d let slip, what he now couldn’t take back or make Foggy un-hear — after Foggy hugged him and refused to let him go despite Matt’s struggles to break free, after the fight finally drained from Matt’s body and he sagged against Foggy and let himself be held. After all that, he hiccupped. Sobbed. And then he broke down crying, shoulders shaking and tears soaking a big wet patch on Foggy’s shoulder, but all completely noiseless, not a single sound escaping from him.

And that’s another thing that tears at Foggy’s heart, because he knows — he knows, he *knows* — that this kind of crying is an ugly and messy and *loud* thing, and the fact that Matt is not being loud means that he’s taught himself how not to make a single sound at some point. How to cry your heart out without being heard.

Foggy has a pretty good idea who made Matt learn that, so he clenches his teeth and clenches his fist, probably further injuring his broken fingers in the process, and just continues holding Matt until he stops shaking, just holds him close, because there was a time when people stopped hugging Matt Murdock and they shouldn’t have.
And so eventually, Matt cries himself into exhaustion.

Foggy slides down onto the floor with him, when Matt’s legs give out, and he’s still holding him when he settles with his back propped by his bedframe and Matt in his arms. Matt sighs into the wet patch on Foggy’s shoulder and it sounds tired and wrecked, and then Foggy hears his breathing slow and even out, and he’s *cried himself to sleep*, Jesus fuck.

The worst part — and that says a lot, because this whole thing is the worst part already – the very worst part is that Matt wasn’t crying because he’s a mess, he wasn’t crying because his life is a clusterfuck of *bad* and *wrong* and *horrible* and *didn’t deserve a single thing of it*. No, oh no; he was crying because Foggy broke his fingers punching a wall, he was crying because Foggy was sad and angry, he was crying because his big secret was out and Foggy was sad and angry because of that, and because Foggy knew, now, and Matt couldn’t make him un-learn that all, and probably because he thought Foggy would look at him differently now, would treat him differently, would pity him.

Foggy has seen Matt cry a grand total of two times in the five years that he’s known him, and neither time Matt cried for himself. Both times it was because of Foggy and *for* Foggy.

Isn’t that just the icing on the cake.

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When Foggy wakes up hours later, in the evening, long after the sun set down, Matt’s gone from the apartment, and Foggy’s all alone on the floor of his bedroom, the still slightly damp material of his shirt over his shoulder the only proof that he didn’t hallucinate any of this.

He knows Matt, he knows Matt better than anyone else in existence — he’s fairly certain of that — and so he shouldn’t be surprised.

And he really, really isn’t.

Maybe just sad, a little.

And concerned, a whole fucking lot.

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It was Thursday night when Matt was drugged, they’ve spent the majority of Friday sitting — crying, sleeping — on the floor Foggy’s bedroom and Matt hasn’t been picking up his phone over the weekend, so Foggy only sees him next Monday morning when he rolls into their office.

He is welcomed by Karen’s sharp intake of breath, and has to keep himself from rolling his eyes. He looks like shit, he’s aware. That’s what not being able to sleep does to you, and Foggy can’t lately. Every time he closes his eyes he sees himself repeatedly stabbing a shadowy weasel-like Mr. Miyagi knock-off, because he has no idea what Stick looks like and his mind is apparently stuck processing him like this.

Foggy is not a violent person. He shies from it, as a general rule. His mother grew up with it and she made sure that both her children knew it was no way of dealing with anything; Foggy considers it a measure of absolute last resort and isn’t even sure that he *would* resort to it, if needed.

And yet here he is, night after night dreaming about murdering a man he’s never met.

It doesn’t feel wrong or dirty either; it feels right and Foggy feels righteous, because Stick is a scum and he hurt Matt, and he would deserve everything Foggy’s tame and non-violent imagination could
come up with.

“You look like shit,” Matt tells him. Karen’s gasp must have lured him out of his office, because he’s standing in the doorway, leaning slightly against the doorframe, with his arms crossed and a smirk plastered on his face.

He’s smiling, actually smiling, a real Matt-brand smirk, not something fake and strained and dishonest. Whatever he did over the weekend must have helped, because he doesn’t look sad and broken anymore, he looks content and confident again, he looks like Matt, Foggy’s cute best friend, with his floppy hair and brilliant smile and unfocused eyes.

The thing is, considering all the things Foggy now knows about Matt and his mental and physical and emotional well-being, he’s not sure if that hasn’t always been just a convenient façade.

“Yeah, and you would know,” Foggy shoots back, because damn. Those were Matt’s secrets. He didn’t mean to spill them and he didn’t mean for Foggy to hear them, so Foggy can at least give him this and follow his lead in how he wants to deal with it — or not deal with it, as the case may be.

If Matt wants to pretend nothing ever happened, Foggy will pretend nothing ever happened alongside him. After all, what can he realistically do? He can’t make Matt talk if Matt doesn’t want to. He can’t force Matt into therapy (even if he could use it, for oh so goddamn many things). He can’t do anything but be there for him, for when Matt himself decides he wants to talk or wants help or needs help, or when it all just comes crushing down around him in a way Foggy hopes will never happen.

“Rough weekend?” Karen asks and Foggy sees a devious smile stretch her lips. “Was Marci involved?”

“Yes and Jesus, Karen, no, ew, get your mind out of the gutter, I don’t even wanna know what you thought I was doing.”

“Probably nothing you haven’t already done, judging by Marci’s sharp everything.”

Foggy makes a gagging sound that makes Matt laugh. “Ew, ew, Karen, what the hell, there are things I don’t want to know that you’re thinking about. I don’t even want to think about them.”

Karen laughs too. “So, what made you look like you haven’t slept tonight?”

Not sleeping tonight, Karen. “One of my neighbours is renovating and thinks that drilling at 5am sharp is the way to go.”

It’s not a lie, even if it’s not the whole truth either, so Matt doesn’t sense it. He just cocks his head slightly to the side and then beams. “I got us a client,” he announces proudly.

Foggy raises his brows. He wonders if Matt getting them a client in any way involved punching bad guys and any amounts of Daredevilling. “You got us a client?” Foggy asked, raising his brows inquiringly.” Matt nods. “If you tell me that it’s a paying client, I’ll hug you.”

“You don’t have to hug me,” Matt says, “but yeah, it’s a paying client.”

Foggy strides over to him and throws his arms around him, pressing him against the doorframe and trapping in the hug. Which, okay, maybe not the brightest idea ever, but it was impulsive. Matt tenses for a second, but then lets out a small laugh and hugs Foggy back, laughs some more into Foggy’s shoulder and does a bit of jumping in place, just up and down.
“Our first paying client who’s not connected to Fisk,” he breathes, giddy. “We’ll finally be able to pay Karen.”

“Damn right, Murdock,” Foggy says and squeezes him some more.

It isn't much — and it's a long way from even remotely okay — but it's a start.

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It occurs to Foggy, some three days later, on a particularly lazy and hot Thursday, that Matt might have no idea what’s going on.

He clearly doesn’t remember a single thing of what happened a week prior and shit, it’s been a week already. He managed to put two and two together and came up with four in the form of I told my best friends things I'd have never told him if I weren’t drugged out of my mind. Foggy told him that he’d made him a promise, but there was a distinct possibility that Matt had no idea what that promise was about.

Proof: On Tuesday, at the end of the day, right before Karen yelled at them and told them to pack up because she wanted to close the office, Foggy threw one arm around Matt’s shoulders and drew him into a loose one-armed embrace. It totally counted as a hug, he reasoned. Matt--Matt froze. He stood in place, with his back ramrod-straight and his arms glued to his sides. Foggy eventually let him go, afraid that Matt might be having some sort of a weird seizure.

“Relax, buddy,” Foggy told him, but took his hands away. “It’s just a hug.”

Matt frowned. “But why?”

Which, okay, weird at first glance, who questions good-natured hugs, but not as weird when Foggy thought it through back at home. Hell, it made sense.

There was a time when people stopped hugging Matt Murdock and they shouldn’t have.

Because if they hadn’t stopped, Matt would know that tactile comfort was totally a thing, that hugs could just be given and didn’t have to be earned and that touching someone didn’t have to have some deeper underlying reason behind it.

Foggy thought about what Matt told him about their hug back in the alley and about touching. Sure, Matt wasn’t lying, Matt was incapable of lying to him that night, but there was still a big difference between what one thought was true and what was objectively true.

Objectively true in this case was that — while Foggy and Matt did touch a lot, even for best friends — all their touching was prompted by something. Fistbumps? Something went well, let’s celebrate. Arm touching? Pay attention to me or guiding. Hugging? Please. When Foggy thought about the instances of himself hugging Matt, he only came up with a handful, all despite how deeply he cares for and loves his best friend. The last time, aside from the ones from that night, was when he gave Matt the Nelson & Murdock sign. Before that? One when they got the internship at L&Z. One on their graduation day. One when they passed all their first-year exams. And that’s--it.

And the thing was, it was so very easy to pin some utilitarian purpose to those hugs. Not a single one of them was just a ‘I love this dumb idiot’ kind of hug, not a single one was of the type that Foggy bestowed upon his various family members without a reason or prompting. And Matt was family; Matt was much closer to him than second cousin Elyse and yet it was Elyse that Foggy greeted with a big hug every time they saw each other and they did so every six years or so.
He saw Matt every day for the past five and a half years.

So.

When Matt froze, it was because there was absolutely no reason for Foggy to hug him, no reason other than the fact that it was Matt, that Foggy loved Matt, and that Foggy made Matt a promise Matt didn’t even remember.

Which was probably for the best, come to think of it, otherwise Matt might have decided that the hug was prompted by Foggy’s sense of duty and was absolutely nothing of import. And that would have kinda defeated the purpose of it.

That is a conclusion that Foggy arrives at on a particularly lazy and hot Thursday.

Five minutes later, he is in Matt’s office, bending awkwardly over Matt and hugging him without letting him out of his chair first. Matt freezes again, but it’s fine. They’ll work on that.

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It goes on for almost a month, with varying degrees of success.

Foggy keeps his promise and Matt gets a hug every day. He deals best with those that he can pin a reason to. He brings iced lattes to the office one day? Great, a hug. They win a case? Let’s celebrate with a hug! They give Karen her first proper paycheck? Let’s hug it out and yes, Karen, you’re invited. Those are the ones he can logically explain to himself.

The ones that come out of nowhere are worse to deal with. He comes into work and smiles brilliantly at everyone? A hug. He comes into work with a pinched expression that means he’s in pain and is trying to hide it, but good luck hiding anything from Foggy, now that he knows what to look for, especially because everything always hurts, and often it’s too loud and just too much, but no one cares? Well, Foggy cares, so a hug. Foggy spies a bloodstain on his dress shirt one evening when they leave court and is pissed? Still a hug. Matt stumbles into Foggy’s apartment in full Daredevil getup, looking like a sad kicked puppy? A hug, hell, two hugs.

It goes on for almost a month and in that time, there’s only one hiccup. But it’s a significant one.

“What are you doing?” Matt asks him one day. He brought fresh bagels to the office, one for everyone. He stops Foggy mid-motion by pressing a hand — in which he’s still holding the bagel bag — to Foggy’s chest.

“Surely by now you’ve realized what me throwing my arms around you means,” Foggy deadpans. “You were supposed to be the smart one, Matty.”

“I know what this is,” Matt says. He sounds pissed, pissed and tired. The morning’s editions of Bulletin and the Bugle both put Daredevil at the site of a gang rape; two of the men apparently managed to escape. Whatever truly happened, it wasn’t a good night. “But why?”

And see, Foggy naively thought they were past this. That Matt didn’t need to have a reason, that a simple ‘because’ was enough of an answer to his ‘why’. “Because.” Foggy shrugs. “No reason.”

That’s the wrong thing to say, apparently. “There’s always a reason,” Matt says and then drops his voice so that Karen won’t hear him, “and if you’re doing this because--because of that, don’t. Stop. I’m not a charity case, I don’t need coddling. I don’t need pity.”

It stings, but it’s not like Foggy has never given Matt a reason to think that. Foggy outright told him
to his face that he felt sorry for him, for fuck’s sake, it wasn’t something that was going to go away on its own, something that Matt would soon forget and brush aside. Only he was brushing it aside, not once has he complained about it, asked about it, got angry about it--

“Okay,” Foggy says, because okay. Okay, no hugging if that makes Matt uncomfortable — Foggy rather thought it doesn’t, but what does he know, Matt’s willing to tell him how he feels so he’s going to respect that — or makes him feel like a pity case. Okay. “Thanks for the bagels, buddy,” he says and takes away the bag from Matt.

The hugging stops.

Matt wears a confused face for the rest of the week.

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Karen picks up on the tension between them immediately. “Did you guys fight again?” she asks when she corners him in their little kitchenette at the end of the week.

“Not really,” Foggy tells her with a shrug. It wasn’t a fight; it was Matt telling him he was uncomfortable — and that was quite possibly the first time Matt ever told him the truth about how he felt and he did so out of his own free will, the absolute pinnacle of Matt’s ability to communicate. It was Matt telling him he was uncomfortable and then feeling bad about saying it, it was Foggy feeling bad about making Matt uncomfortable, Foggy feeling bad for Matt in general and then feeling bad for feeling bad. It was just a clusterfuck of not knowing how to deal, because how do you deal?

None of the various popular media Foggy has consumed over the years ever dealt with the aftermath of being drugged and spilling secrets. It was a serious overlook.

It wasn’t a fight. They didn’t fight. They had nothing to fight about.

“So you’re not angry with Matt?” Karen presses still.

“Why would I be angry with Matt?” Foggy asks, honestly perplexed. He and Matt were perfectly civil with each other. Hell, they went drinking with Karen not two evenings ago. “What, did he say something?”

“No, but I think it’s the stuff Matt doesn’t say that’s the most telling,” Karen says. Foggy’s floored. He underestimated her, he really, really did. She’s only known Matt for a few months and yet managed to pinpoint what took Foggy years to wrap his head around. She was so damn observant; there was no way they’d ever keep anything a secret from her.

Foggy puts two sugar cubes into his tea and stirs. “Then why are you asking?”

Karen shrugs. “You had that hugging crusade going on and then it stopped, for as much reason as it started, and Matt’s looking confused, like a puppy which doesn’t know why it’s been kicked, you keep throwing him guilty glances, and you both look just so desolate and then pretend you don’t when you realise someone’s looking at you.” She takes a deep breath and puts her hand on his. That’s how he knows he won’t like what she says next. “Did you--did you try dating and it didn’t work out? It’s none of my business, true, I just want to know if you’re going to be able to work together or if it’s too awkward now.”

He gapes. “Karen, it’s--“

“It’s been known to happen,” she adds quietly. She doesn’t move her hand away. “It would suck.” Foggy laughs and it sounds way too hysterical for his liking. “We’re not dating, Karen. We--Matt--
We’ve never dated, okay? It’s something--It’s something different.”

“Which you can’t tell me about.” Foggy nods helplessly. “And I assume it’s personal?” He nods again and she huffs. “I don’t get paid enough to deal with this.”

It’s something she can say now, because they’ve had a few clients who paid them in things other than homemade pie and gratitude, and so they could afford to give her a paycheck. On the other hand, she really wasn’t getting paid enough to have to deal with their problems, and their inability to deal with their own problems.

“Whatever it is that you’re not talking about, or think that you don’t have to talk about,” Karen continues, “you do have to talk about it. You’re both miserable, Foggy, even more than you were when you fought before, and I didn’t think it was possible.”

“Yeah, this is--more complicated than that,” Foggy admits and, to his unending surprise, finds himself meaning it.

Finding out that Matt was a vigilante accused of blowing half of Hell’s Kitchen up and killing countless people in cold blood, finding out that Matt’s been lying to him since the day they met — that was the worst day and the worst revelation of Foggy’s life. And yet this? Trumped it. It was worse. Three times over. Worse cubed. It blew right past any scale of badness that Foggy had.

“I imagine,” Karen says with a wry smile. She pats his hand. “Just--talk, okay? The last time you fought, you’ve talked things through. It helped.”

Foggy doesn’t disabuse her of that notion. The last time they fought — to start with, they actually fought, the last time, with proper shouting and door-slamming and everything — he ended up coming to Matt’s ancient gym, they mentioned moving forward and then promptly did move forward, to the point that Foggy found himself in the role of Concerned Superhero’s Girlfriend, telling Matt to go be a hero and not to kill himself, to complete the cliché. They didn’t talk; at no point, starting from the moment Foggy slammed the door to Matt’s apartment shut, did they actually talk about that fight. Or anything.

For all that they were great lawyers and there were times when they wouldn’t shut up, talking wasn’t really their strong suit. Not when it mattered, anyway. They were the masters of ignoring their issues in hopes they’d just go away on their own.

They should work on that.

“Yeah,” Foggy says and picks up his mug, takes a sip of the tea. The sugar didn’t dissolve yet, so it tastes bitter, just like the lie he tells Karen. “It did.”

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Since Foggy’s revenge plans and dreams of killing Stick with various household items involve more dreaming than killing, Foggy decides to pursue the matter in ways that are more appropriate for the likes of him.

First stop: research.

He does as much of it as he did right before their bar exam and definitely more than he ever did while at Columbia. He brings it all home, too, does it in his spare time, just to make sure that Matt doesn’t accidentally stumble upon any of it at the office, or that Karen doesn’t read something to him thinking it’s for a case of theirs. It’s Foggy’s case; he’s not going to bring it to Matt unless he’s sure it’s air-tight, unless he knows that he has something that could be brought into court if Matt decided
to take it there.

Foggy’s pretty sure that Matt’ll never do it. But on the off-chance that he would, Foggy cannot present him with a half-assed motion with no background and supporting arguments, something that even a first-year law student should be ashamed of. It’s a solid case or nothing, because there’s nothing more damaging than false hope.

The positives: New York does not have a statute of limitations for first degree rape, including any rape of a child younger than eleven. Just reading that and thinking shit, that’s Matt makes him sick. Realising that there instances and crimes that do fall under the statute of limitations makes him gag. Second degree sexual conduct against a child has a period of limitation of five years, Jesus fuck. Why would you even give degrees to that, holy shit. Foggy didn’t care about this all that much when they covered it in criminal law and family law lectures and he didn’t even remember about this little tidbit.

He finds himself caring a lot now.

Especially since there wasn’t really any substantial difference between first and second degree, and a good enough — translation: soulless and evil enough — lawyer would manage to bump first degree down to second and get their client off relatively easy. They could get it dismissed due to the limitation period expiring.

Jesus fucking Christ, that’s sick.

The positives: the limitation period does not apply in this case, thankfully—(no, fuck, no, shit, how could you even think that, Nelson, what is wrong with you, thankfully, thankfully, Jesus, you’re worst, that’s the most disgusting thing you could ever think, thankfully, fucking hell, yeah but also no).

Again.

The positives: the limitation period does not apply in this case and Foggy could verbally disembowel Stick in a court of law and get him those twenty-five years in prison. Fuck, no, he’d go all-in and get him on all possible charges. A whole list of limitation-less first degrees that makes him want to cry and shoot people simultaneously. Happy rotting in prison until the day you die, Stick, you miserable evil fuck.

However.

The negatives: a limitation period for a civil action that even with the recently relaxed conditions still expired. So no milking the guy off millions in compensation, sadly; the satisfaction of seeing Stick behind bars forever would have to do.

But the most worrisome problem that Foggy encounters is this.

The negatives: how the fuck do you prosecute a guy named Stick?

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You don’t, that’s the answer.

You just can’t.

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That’s a bit of a problem.

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But he can’t legally be named ‘Stick’, right?

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Second stop: locate the guy.

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“You’re a private detective, right?” Foggy blurts out the moment Jess cracks her door open.

“I prefer the term ‘investigator’, but yeah, essentially,” she answers. “You want something, Nelson?”

He shifts his weight from one leg to the other nervously. “I’d like to hire you.”

Jess’ brows shoot up to her hairline, but she does open the door and lets him inside. The apartment is as dark and twisted as Jess herself and it suits her perfectly. It also suits Foggy’s recent mood.

Jess takes him to her tiny living room-turned-office and points at a well-used armchair that Foggy gladly sinks onto. She gets to a swiveling chair behind her desk and sits in it, facing him. “Normally I’d tell you to come to my office during working hours,” she tells him, “but you look desperate and like shit, so I’ve decided to accommodate you. Plus my place is my office, so you know.”

“How very gracious of you,” Foggy murmurs. “A ‘thank you’ for all that sugar I never borrowed from you, I suppose.”

Jess shrugs. “So what is it about you wanting to hire me...?”

Foggy takes a deep breath and reaches into the breast pocket of his shirt to take out a small folded piece of paper. He hands it to Jess. “There’s this case that I’m working on. I need to find this guy to have charges brought against him and then to have him die in prison like he deserves to.”

Jess unfolds the paper and reads what’s written on it. She frowns, turns the paper around to see if there’s anything written on the other side; finding nothing, she looks back to the note and barks out a laugh. “Are you shitting me?”

“No.”

“You honestly expect me to find a guy named Stick?” Jess asks in an incredulous voice. “You’ve gotta give me something more than this, Nelson.”

“He’s blind,” Foggy supplies, “if that helps.”

“He’s--“ Jess shakes her head. “Yes, that helps. Helps a lot. It’s not gonna be quick and easy, Nelson.”

“If you don’t want to take the case,” Foggy says as he puts his hands on the armrests, makes sure that his whole body language speaks of preparing to get up and leave, “you say so. I’ve heard that Dakota North is great with hopeless cases, maybe she’d be able to help.”

Jess narrows her eyes. “I never said I didn’t want to take the case,” she says coldly. “In fact, I do want to take the case, and definitely not because you’ve just name-dropped my fierce competitor in hopes of goading me into helping you. Nope, I just see it as a challenge. I like a good challenge.”
So she knows he tried to play her. On the plus side, she still hasn’t kicked him out of her apartment or kicked him period. “Great,” he says and risks a grin.

“Plus,” Jess carries on, “unlike certain Miss North, I have a source at SHIELD. And if anyone’s capable of finding your Stick—”

“He’s not mine.”

“—it’s the supranational espionage agency.” Jess crumples the piece of paper and shoves it into her jeans pocket. “It’s going to cost you, Nelson, fair warning.”

“I don’t care.”

Jess arches a brow. “Must be one hell of a case then.”

Foggy nods. “The most important of my career.”

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Their new case ends with an out-of-court settlement and a large compensation cheque for their client, so they feel validated when they charge the guy a decent fee. It's their third paying client in a row and Foggy really digs this whole ‘getting paid’ thing.

Which comes in handy after his mother calls him one day.

They're sitting in the conference room and are going over their deposition notes they've prepared for tomorrow when Foggy's phone rings. It actually startles Matt into jumping in his chair, that's how zoned out he was. Foggy mutters a quick apology, glances at the caller id and sees 'MATER', all caps, and immediately picks up. His mother--well. She doesn't appreciate her calls not being answered. It wouldn't be half-bad if she assumed and worried that something terrible happened to you if you didn't pick up at once; but no, Anna Nelson didn't do that — unless your name was Matt Murdock, and Anna Nelson loved you most. But if your name was Candace or God forbid Foggy, Anna Nelson would keep calling you until you did pick up and then she'd seethe into your ear so you think there's something more important and interesting than your own mother. Not even death would excuse you not answering.

So there. Foggy mutters a quick apology and picks up. "Hello mother dear," he says and Matt's head perks up in curiosity. Anna absolutely adores him — Foggy is pretty sure that if she were ever told that she could save the life of only one of her two children, she'd choose Matt — and the feeling's completely mutual. Traitors, the lot of them. At least Foggy has Cande. "How are things going on this fine day?"

"You're at work?" Anna asks, cutting straight to the point. Foggy sighs.

"Yes, mother," he says. "It's Tuesday, 1 pm, where else would I be."

"Is Matty there with you?"

Foggy raises his brows and turns to Matt, who's not even pretending that he isn't listening to the conversation. Foggy's expression is of course lost on Matt, whose freaky senses and world on fire don't extend that far, but he must get the vague idea of Foggy's confusion, because he shrugs.

"I am feeling fine, mother, thank you for asking," Foggy tells her with utmost seriousness instead of replying. "It's been a great day, yes, I'm very happy today. We got a lucrative settlement, the weather's beautiful, and my most beloved mum is calling to ask about her firstborn's well-being—"
"Franklin."

"Yes, mum," Foggy rolls his eyes purely for his own benefit, "your favourite son is sitting right next to me. It's nice to know that you care about at least one of us."

"Put me on speaker," Anna demands.

Foggy, of course, doesn't actually have to do it, Matt hears the conversation just fine without it, but Anna's lie-detector is almost as sharp as Matt's when it comes to Foggy's bullshit, so she'd know if he didn't. Somehow. Foggy's sure that she'd know. So he taps the button and sets his phone in the middle of the table.

Anna's voice changes and gets three degrees warmer the moment Foggy turns the speaker on. "Hello, Matt," she greets him, "how are you, sweetheart? I hear congratulations are in order."

Foggy rolls his eyes so hard that he's half-convinced they're going to fall out. Matt, on the other hand, blushes brightly at the endearment. Over five years of knowing the Nelsons and he still gets embarrassed by any amount of affection shown him.

"I'm fine, Mrs. Nelson, thank you," Matt says. "And thank you again. We're happy with the settlement, Foggy did a great job preparing it."

Anna laughs. "I have no doubt that he did," she says. "I'm so proud of you both, my boys are--"

"Mum," Foggy interrupts her before she can wax any overblown compliments and make Matt die of embarrassment, "is there a reason why you're calling? Not that I don't want to listen to you telling us how awesome we are..."

"Yes, I do have a reason." Anna clears her throat. "As for Sunday, you've got to be here at noon at the latest, we've pushed it a bit. Don't forget."

"I won't," Foggy says, despite not being clear what his mother is talking about. Not like he can admit that. He'll figure it out on his own, worst case scenario he'll just call Candace and ask. It's better to be mocked by a sister than murdered by a mother, especially since he's convinced Matt would feel obliged to defend her and he would probably end up getting her off the hook.

"Oh, and Matt, sweetie?" This is interesting, Foggy wasn't aware that Matt could turn that particular shade of red. "You're not allergic to pistachios, are you?"

"No, Mrs. Nelson," Matt murmurs, "I'm not. I quite like them."

"Splendid," Anna claps her hands on the other side of the phone call, "because I'm making pistachio icing for the cupcakes, and I know you love cupcakes, so I wouldn't want you to be unhappy with the flavours."

"You know, I like pistachios too," Foggy adds hopefully.

"Yes, okay, Foggy. I'll see you boys on Sunday."

And she hangs up. She just hangs up. Foggy sighs heavily and resists the urge to bang his head against the nearest flat surface.

"What's on Sunday?" Matt asks.

Foggy scratches his head. "No idea," he admits. He flips through his mental calendar. "Sunday is,
what, the 7th? What could--Crap."

Matt frowns. "Isn't the 7th your grandmother's birthday?"

"Yeah, it is." Foggy rubs his hands across his eyes. "I completely forgot, with everything," he motions his hand around, "I forgot. Shit. I don't even have anything for her. I'm so dead. We're so dead, Matt."

Matt shifts uncomfortably in his chair, and Foggy's eyes narrow. Uh-oh. That's not a good sign.

"Am I--" Matt bits his lip. "Am I invited?"

"You've heard my mother, your presence is pretty much a default setting, you don't need to be invited."

Anna would probably kill Foggy if he dared to show up without her favourite son, she would kill him and dismember him, and then she'd dump parts of his body across New York. She was scary that way and definitely liked Matt more. Perhaps it's because she never knew him as a child or a whiny teenager. The moment that thought forms in his mind, Foggy soberly. Yeah, not. He doesn't want to think what Anna would have done if she knew Matt as a child. Adopted him, for sure. Killed someone, a certain someone, a distinct possibility. She knew how to use a gun properly, unlike her kids.

Matt shrugs and Foggy's eyes narrow even further. "Why wouldn't you be invited in the first place?"

Matt shrugs again. "I just thought," he says, "that with all this, after everything, you might not want me near your family."

In hindsight, it's such a Matt thing to say and such a Matt suspicion and fear to harbour. Foggy should know better, especially now.

"Might be tough, seeing as you are my family," Foggy points out. "Not to mention, mum would kick me out of the house if I showed up without you and would tell me not to come back unless it's with you in tow."

"So I am invited."

He wonders how much an eye-replacement surgery costs, or if you could enter the Olympics in eye-rolling. He's going for gold here, it'd be a shame to let these muscles go to waste. "Yes, Matt, you are invited. It's Grams' birthday and she adores you, she'd never forgive me or you if you didn't come. Besides, she's the one who keeps saying--"

He trails off. Hmm. Shouldn't have said that.

"She keeps saying what?" Matt asks, because he loves poking and doesn't know when not to.

"Nothing."

"Foggy."

Fine. "That if we get married you'll be obliged to come to all family functions and dinners, so why don't we." Huh. Come to think of it, this particular shade of red looks quite good on Matt. Foggy waves his hand dismissively. "It's Grams, she has crazy ideas, she's been trying to sell me in marriage for a decade now, don't mind her."
'I don't,' Matt says immediately. "I don't mind."

***

Jess texts him when he's packing to leave the office in the evening.


"Something important?" Matt asks.

Foggy shakes his head. "Nope," he says, and pockets the phone.

***

Karen proves to be grade A material for evil manipulative overlord when he least expects her to, which just happens to be a Friday.

It might be payback for the fact that — due to being overworked with the new civil lawsuit case that was stubbornly proving to be more difficult and complicated than they initially anticipated — he and Matt had her run errands for them for the entire day. And not just proper, firm-related errands like mail and courthouse documents, no; she had to go get lunch, dinner, as well as go and pick up the cashmere pashmina wrap that Grams has been talking about for a year now and that they've decided to gift her ("Neither of us can exactly afford it," Matt said, "but if we buy it together and split the price, it becomes almost reasonable.").

So, Karen might be slightly offended that they've used her as a personal assistant rather than a paralegal-in-training super secretary that she was. Or she truly just is evil, which is a theory Foggy finds more and more probable.

Karen talks them into joining her for drinks at Josie's in the evening. In the bar, Karen proceeds to get them tipsy and then makes sure they get closer to drunk. And only then does she get a very convenient text.

"It's from a friend," Karen tells them, very cryptic and vague. "I have to go, sorry."

"What friend?" Foggy asks. "Everyone you know is here."

Karen only smiles. Foggy doesn't like that smile, that smile looks way too sneaky and self-satisfied for his liking, which is exactly what he tells Matt. That makes her smile wider. She kisses each of their cheeks and takes her bag. "I've gotta go. You should stay, though, talk some and--yeah. See you on Monday!"

Evil manipulative overlord Karen, all bow down before her might.

"Surprisingly, I agree," Matt states, which makes Foggy realise that he said the last part out loud. "I think she got us prup--purps--she wanted us drunk. Evil Karen."

Foggy clinks his glass against Matt's. "Amen to that. Though she doesn't have a goatee."

Matt snorts into his drink.

Eventually they end up at Foggy's place, because while Matt's apartment is closer to the office, Foggy's is closer to Josie's, which obviously makes it a superior location. And it's overall nicer. Cozier, more homey, more comfortable. It's smaller than Matt's place, because Foggy didn't get a billboard-induced discount and couldn't afford a place like Matt's at a normal rate, but it's not tiny,
and Matt has no trouble navigating around the sometimes cluttered space. He knows this place like his own.

He prefers it to his own.

"It's late, Matt," Foggy says as they get into the living room. "You can crash here, it'd be dumb to try and get home at this hour."

Matt doesn't tell him that his apartment isn't home, not this time. This time it's a, "thanks, Foggy."

"Sure thing." Foggy picks up some of his research notes and some of the materials that Jess got for him from her FBI friend off the couch and drops them onto the floor next to it. "Make yourself at home," 'home', ha, not actually funny, "while I dash to wash the taste of tequila out of my mouth before it gets stuck there forever."

Since Karen was the one who got them drunk — well, drunk-ish, neither of them is actually all that drunk — and then just left, Foggy is blaming her for the grave omission that was leaving his notes in an easily-accessed place, leaving the notes with Matt and then leaving Matt with them alone. If he weren't drunk, he wouldn't have made such a dumb mistake.

As it is, when he gets back from the bathroom tasting only mint on his breath, he finds Matt sitting on the couch with a tight expression on his face, a sheet of paper in hand, trailing his fingers over the handwritten note.

"What is this?" Matt asks.

"Nothing."

"Lie."

Foggy sighs. There's no point in lying. Not only does Matt sense it, it's also pretty clear what this is just from the piece of paper he's holding. It's the note Foggy made the night before, just a little rundown of the things he knew thanks to Jess' FBI files. The phrase 'thrice-damned evil bastard' and the word 'Stick' were both underlined three times, so there was no mistaking that, Matt could feel the pen indents and knew what it said.

"A little pet project," Foggy says. Not a lie. "I'm trying to find out what I could do to turn that guy's life into a living hell."

Matt crumples the piece of paper in his hand. "Drop it."

Foggy crosses his arms over his chest. "Yeah, how about 'no'."

Matt makes an unhappy noise. "Just leave it, Foggy," he says. "It's not important."

"It is important to me!" Foggy throws his hands up in exasperation. "It pisses me off how stoic and zen you are. Be angry! Fuck, be hateful, be scared, just be something."

"What would be the point?" Matt asks and sounds pissed. Well, Foggy got at least that much. "It's long in the past, it doesn't matter, it was--just--a part of the training--"

"It does matter, and the latter is pure brainwashed bullshit. Matt, you've got to know that."

Matt bridles at that. "You don't get it."

"Enlighten me then."
"You don't know how it was before he came," Matt hisses. "My senses were--too much. They just were too much. I was going insane. Stick taught me how to control them, rein them in, how to use them. I'd have gone crazy if not for him. Nothing is going to diminish what he did for me."

Foggy collapses onto his armchair. "And that in no way makes what he did to you any less horrifying and not okay," he says tiredly.

Matt takes off his glasses and rubs at his eyes. "Drop it," he repeats.

"No."

"The conversation," Matt clarifies. "I don't want to talk about it. It'll end up in a fight. I don't want to fight."

"So what, we're just going to pretend nothing happened and we don't have a fundamental disagreement on moral grounds? We're not going to talk? Like the last time we fought?"

Matt's back goes ramrod-straight. "We don't have to talk about that either. It's fine."

"It's shit, not fine." Foggy leans forward in his armchair, rests his elbows on his thighs. "We kind of do need to talk about that, Matt."

"We don't. It's fine."

"I walked out on you," Foggy reminds him, because apparently Matt is suffering from a bout of very selective amnesia. "I walked out and slammed the door behind me, leaving you injured and still half-dead and crying and alone. I told you I'd have kicked your ass and meant it."

"I deserved it," Matt says and yeah, he means it, and yeah, it might be a little bit true. "I've lied to you for years and it was all my fault."

"Yeah, well." Foggy shrugs. "Doesn't make it any less of an asshole thing to do. I'm sorry for that."

Matt puts his legs on the couch, bends his knees and presses them to his chest, wraps his arms around them. A protective gesture. Matt sometimes does that, when he's really rattled and doesn't know how to react. "It's fine," he whispers, repeats it for the third time as if hoping that saying it multiple times will magically make it true. "You had the right. I deserved it."

"I treated you like shit, didn't actually listen to your explanation and said some horrible stuff. No matter how angry I was, you didn't deserve any of that." Foggy moves his armchair closer to the couch, so close that Matt's at arm's length. "You can be pissed at me for those things, you know? You don't have to--you shouldn't let it go just like that."

"I don't want to lose you," Matt whispers. "You're my only friend. I can't--I can't lose you."

"Give me your hand," Foggy says out of the blue, startling Matt, and extends his own expectantly.

Matt frowns. "Why?"

"Matt."

"But why?"

Foggy rolls his eyes. Really, a master champion. "Because I want it, how's that for a reason."

Matt slowly, cautiously, slips his hand into Foggy's. Foggy squeezes Matt's hand and then claps
Matt's wrist, moves his hand so that his index and middle finger are pressed to Matt's wrist, exactly over the pulse point. Foggy stays still for a moment, reveling in the steady beat under his fingertips.

"You're not going to lose me," Foggy tells him, makes sure it sounds extra earnest. "I'm with you, for better or worse. But we've gotta work on some things, Matty. Communication, for one. You can't lie to me anymore. I know it's pretty much compulsive with you, but you've got to try. If you're hurt, if you're in pain, you have to tell me because then I can help you. Tell me what you need, how you feel. If I'm to be your support system, I need to know how to support you."

"Okay," Matt says, slightly dazed.

"Secondly," Foggy licks his lips, "don't just take my bullshit, alright? The right to be pissed goes both ways. When I hurt you or offend you, you have the right to be pissed at me. I'm not--I'm not going to just pack up and leave because of that."

Matt bites down on his lower lip, worries it between his teeth. The fingers of his free hand tap a steady rhythm on his leg. He does that when he has something to say but is unsure of how it'll be received, of how to phrase it.

"You want to say something," Foggy observes, "so out with it."

Matt seems surprised that Foggy knows it. It actually surprises Foggy. Matt anticipates and analyses behaviour based on the changes in heartbeats and breathing patterns, but Foggy has his own ways of doing that. Foggy studies the changes in body language, he can read Matt's facial expressions, he knows what various ticks and quirks and sitting positions means. Come to think of it, Foggy knows as many creepy private facts about Matt's behaviour as Matt does about his.

"Matt," Foggy prompts him when Matt fails to utter a word.

Matt takes a deep breath. "You said," he says and pauses. Bites the inside of his cheek. "You said that you felt sorry for me, all these years," he continues so quietly that Foggy has to strain to hear. "Did you mean that?"

Foggy's brows raise in surprise. "Your built-in polygraph didn't give you an answer to that?"

Matt shrugs and looks away. "You were angry," he says, "so your heart was already racing. I wouldn't--couldn't tell."

"Shit, God, that's--" Foggy squeezes Matt's hand again. "I didn't mean it," he tells him. It's the absolute truth. "I was angry and I wanted to hurt you. I knew that you hate being pitied and I knew that saying that would cut at you. I said it on purpose to make you hurt, but I didn't mean it."

Matt's mouth forms a surprised 'o'. "That's--That's evil, Foggy," he says. There's a teasing edge to his voice. And sure, Foggy would love it if Matt had a healthy reaction to the revelation that his best friend used one of his biggest fears against him to just hurt him — he'd even take a punch for that — because that was one of the shittiest things Foggy could have done, but yeah, if Matt wants to approach it with humour for now, let's go with that.

"I never said that I'm cheerful and cuddly," Foggy says with a shrug. "People only assume that I am because I'm friends with you, and next to you everyone seems cheerful and cuddly. But who knows. Maybe I've been lying to you all this time and I actually double as a supervillain after hours."

Matt smiles, the smile small but fond. "I can't quite see you as a supervillain."

"Yeah, well, you see shit, buddy."
That makes Matt laugh out loud and for Foggy it's a victory.

***

Saturday morning he makes Matt breakfast, which they eat on Foggy's couch, Matt's legs tangled in his. It's all very domestic, the way their law school days were, when Matt would sit on their battered little sofa next to him, lean against him and listen to Foggy talk about case-law. Which is not unlike what they're doing now, with the couch, the breakfast and the legs, and also the fact that Matt somehow gets Foggy to tell him all about his research.

And because Foggy's always had problems saying 'no' to him, he does.

There really is no point in lying or pretending it's not there and hiding it. Matt already knows it's there, and Foggy's put a lot of work into building this case. He has all the legal arguments neatly laid down, he anticipated the defence's rebuttals and prepared counter-rebuttals that'd drag them down. He has a long list of precedents to rely on and quote from, some additional ones even from such exotic jurisdictions like Canada and the UK. A lot of hard work and sleepless nights and coffee and anger went into this, and Matt makes impressed noises from mid-point onwards. He calmly listens to Foggy rattle off the list of charges — rape in the first degree of a person less than eleven years old, criminal sexual act in the first degree against a person less than eleven years old, course of sexual conduct against a child in the first degree, those are the only ones that'd stick and didn't expire — and while Foggy knows he's a crap actor, he does admire Matt's absolute poker face. His face is slack, devoid of a shadow of emotion.

"That's impressive," he says once Foggy is done telling him everything. "Too bad you have no one to prosecute," he adds with that self-deprecating smile of his.

Foggy thinks about Jess, most likely working on the other side of his bedroom wall. "I'm working on that."

Matt thumbs the stack of papers on Foggy's coffee table. "I still don't get why you're so obsessed with this," he mutters, and it's so quiet that Foggy's not sure if Matt meant it for his ears. "It's not important."

"It is important," Foggy insists, "because you are important. You are important to me."

When Matt looks up at him, he wears a perplexed expression, the same one he had when Foggy told him he didn't hate him, all those weeks ago on Confession Night. And yes, that's how he's calling it now, Confession Night, capital letters like in That Day, and it's slightly scary that Foggy now has codenames for two events. It does make it easier to think and talk about them, though.

Matt thinks no one loves him. He thinks he doesn't deserve it. It makes Foggy want to quit his job and dedicate his life to inventing a time machine for the sole purpose of traveling back in time to punch every single asshole who made Matt think that, or contributed to that belief.

At least Matt doesn't ask why, because Foggy's not sure he'd be able not to cry if he did.

Matt leaves his place around noon. Foggy walks him to the door where they stop for a moment, and Foggy puts his hand on Matt's arm and contemplates pulling him in for a hug — and Matt looks like he's waiting for that to happen, with a curious half-resigned, half-something else expression — but since Matt hasn't said anything about being okay with hugs again, Foggy doesn't.

He pats Matt's shoulder instead. "I'll come pick you up around eleven tomorrow," he tells him, "and we'll get to Grams' together. You've got that shawl, right?"
"Wrap," Matt corrects him. "I do, don't worry. Foggy, I--" He wets his lower lip. "That's a very good and strong case. You should be proud."

"I'll be proud when we get it to court," Foggy murmurs.

Matt smiles sadly. "If."

"When, and that's a promise."

Matt shakes his head, grabs his cane from where he propped it against a wall the night before, and exits Foggy's apartment. Foggy closes the door behind him and sighs.

Matt's a lot of work.

***

There's a knock on his door not fifteen minutes later. Foggy rolls his eyes and gets off the couch, pads to open it. Trust Matt to forget something when he's come here with nothing.

But it's not Matt that's waiting on the other side when Foggy cracks the door open. It's Jess. "Hi, Jess."

"The cute guy that just left," Jess asks. "Boyfriend?"

Foggy takes a step back and lets her in. "No. Just a friend."

"Sure is." She walks in. He notices that she has a slim file under her arm. "You care for him?"

"What?"

"You friend," Jess repeats. "Do you care for him?"

"What does that have to do--"

"Just answer the question."

"No." Foggy crosses his arms over his chest. "Not until you tell me what's going on."

She throws the slim file onto his coffee table. It upsets the meticulously built stack of papers that he's had there and all his research notes go flying.

"It has a lot to do with this." Jess points at the file. "SHIELD has a pretty extensive file on your Stick. Did you know that he's American?"

Foggy grabs the file. "Jess, this is awesome! What else did you learn?"

"That I should drop the case."

Foggy drops both the files and his jaw. "Why? Jess, why--"

"According to SHIELD, he works for the Chaste," Jess tells him. "You know who they are?" Foggy shakes his head. No idea what the Chaste is. "Crazy people. Crazy homicidal people, but it gets much worse, because they're afflicted with the Hand."

"Who are also crazy people?" he asks as he bends to retrieve the folder.

"They are a fucking crazy ninja death cult." Jess starts pacing. "You got me to investigate a ninja
death cult, Nelson. Trust me, I've done and seen some crazy shit in my time, and this is way out of my league. SHIELD fears those guys, my source almost fell out of their chair in fear when they got a match for that Stick of yours."

"He's not mine," Foggy reminds her.

He tries not to let what Jess says get to him, but he does wonder. Who the fuck is that Stick? Matt didn't tell him more than that he trained him — and 'trained' him, that fucking bastard — and that he was violent and abandoned him. Now a crazy ninja death cult is involved? He freezes. That Day, That Day Matt told him that Fisk injured him, Fisk and some Nobu guy, some Nobu guy who was a ninja, holy shit, what if that Nobu was one of Stick's people? What if Stick sent him to kill Matt?

"I sure hope he isn't," Jess mutters. She takes a breath. "Look, Nelson, you're a great guy and I'd love to help. But you know, I like being alive. I have a good life, I have an amazing boyfriend whom I also like alive. I'm not risking having my throat cut, or his throat cut, for poking in the wrong places and the business of the wrong people. And if you care for that friend of yours," Jess waves a hand at his apartment door, "you'll drop this too."

He cares for Matt. He cares for Matt more than he can put into words, more than he knows how. Which is exactly why he can't just drop it. He can't fix what's already happened, but he can help this way, he can make sure that the goddamn fucking bastard that did it is not out there anymore, that he's dealt with the way he deserves.

He can't tell Jess any of that, so he only says, "I can't."

Jess huffs in indignation. "Fuck, Nelson, you're a stubborn one." She points at the file again. "That's all my SHIELD contact got me before noping out of this inquiry. Have fun reading and good luck, I hope you survive the experience."

The file's very slim. Unlikely that Foggy will learn a lot from it. Alas, it's not Jess' fault. "Thanks, Jess."

She heads towards his door. "Nelson," she says with her hand on the door handle, "at least tell me that you're after him for thirty counts of murder or something like that."

"Child abuse, actually."

Jess drops her hand and spins on her heel to face him. "Child abuse?" she asks. "We're risking our lives dabbling in the affairs of the Chaste and the Hand because your Stick hit a kid?"

Fuck it. "Also rape," he tells her coldly. "Multiple instances of. And two counts of sexual abuse."

She pales. "He raped a kid?" She blinks. Foggy nods. "He raped a kid?"

"Yeah."

He doesn't have the time to react when Jess strides back into the living room and yanks the file from him. "I'll get more on him, but you've got to end up ensuring a conviction," she says, agitated. "No half-assed deals with the prosecution. A proper conviction."

"That's the plan," he tells her.

She nods. Grips the file tighter and moves back towards the door. "I fucking hate rapists," she announces loudly. "I'll make Eric research more, I'll make him. I'll get back to you in the evening with more info."
And with that she leaves, slamming the door shut.

***

*He's in the US, Jess* texts him in the evening, as promised.

It shouldn't make him vindictively excited, but it *does*.

Just wait, you fucking miserable evil bastard, Foggy will make you *pay*.

***

It rains, on Sunday morning, because *of course* it rains. Foggy sighs and walks over to his closet, from which he has to take out all of his jackets in order to find his biggest umbrella tucked away in a corner for some reason, despite the fact that it’s the one Foggy uses most often. It’s a disgustingly cute thing, all bright pink with big eyes painted on the designated front and ears attached at the top, that Candace gave him for birthday first year of law school, when Foggy once — by accident — complained in her presence about not having an umbrella big enough to fit both him and Matt under it. Candace — because she’s a jerk, how come they’re even related, no one in his immediate family reaches quite that level of gleeful assholery, she must have taken after someone from a way farther generation — laughed for an hour straight about Foggy being the designated umbrella-carrier in this new relationship, and then gifted him *that* four months later.

Candace lives under the illusion that she’s just so quirky and funny and charming. She’s none of those things.

The umbrella is big enough to fit both him and Matt, though.

It’s a shame that it had to rain, Foggy muses as he walks to Matt’s. Matt lives pretty much on the opposite side of Hell’s Kitchen from him, but it only makes for a ten-minute-long walk, God bless the size of their neighbourhood. Grams lives further away, in Harlem, half an hour by subway, and absolutely refuses to leave. That was Joy Connor for you, worse yet than her grandson and it was Foggy who was called ‘stubborn’. Joy Connor has lived in Harlem since she moved to New York in the 60s, she survived the riots, the crime and even the Hulk, and was not going to leave her home until the day she died, no matter how much worry she caused her daughter. Or at least that’s what she claimed.

Foggy didn’t complain; with his parents — well, his dad, he was the one who could cook actual food in this family, Mum was only good for pastries — holed up in Princeton, the fact that Grams and her splendid cooking skills were a mere trip on the C line away was a blessing, some times. Joy Connor living in Harlem and willing to cook for her only grandson whenever he called were one of the reasons Foggy and Matt didn’t starve to death during their second year.

She had them over for dinner a lot during that year. And she *adored* Matt.

Foggy knocks on Matt's door and waits for him to open. He has a spare key now — insisted that he *should*, for emergencies, and the next day Matt handed him a complete set, lips pursed, expression tight, no comment — but he’s not going to just start letting himself in, hello, he knows what privacy means, not like a certain *someone* who seems to think that because he *can* open Foggy’s living room window from the fire escape, he *should* every time a fancy strikes.

"Ready?" Foggy asks cheerfully when Matt cracks the door open.

Matt lets him in. "Yeah," he says. "I just need to grab our present, wait a moment..."
He disappears through the still broken door leading to his bedroom. Foggy looks around, taking in the changes, and realises that he hasn't stepped into Matt's apartment since the day he found out about Matt's after-hours activities. The knowledge that the last time he was here, he did everything he could to hurt his best friend sits ill with him, twists his insides into knots of disgust and shame.

"You alright?" Matt's voice comes from the bedroom. "Your heartbeat spiked."

"I'm fine," Foggy lies and Matt tactfully doesn't call him out on it. "Nice table."

There is indeed a new coffee table, between two armchairs and a sofa that's also new. The old one was probably blood-stained beyond saving. Foggy wonders, for a moment, about how Matt got rid of it. What did he tell the crew that came to pick the old one up? Did he try to claim that it was spilt wine? Matt would.

"Thanks." Matt appears in the bedroom doorway holding his cane in one hand, a slim velvet box in the other. It's bright red. Foggy wonders if the shop assistant informed Matt of that. "Karen helped me pick it."

"That explains why it's nice," Foggy jokes, and the corner of Matt's mouth tugs upwards. "You never told me what happened to the old one."

It immediately falls back down and Matt purses his lips, thins them almost to the point of non-existence. Well then. Foggy's not getting an answer to that today. Instead he extends his hand and takes the box from Matt, puts it into his bag, and gestures at the door. "Shall we? We need to catch the next train unless we want to be late and give mum another reason to kill me."

"Just you?"

"Please, she loves you too much. Me? Pff. She has Cande as the back-up kid, while you're irreplaceable."

That at least makes Matt smile again.

***

They manage to catch the next C train and settle comfortably — or as comfortably as you can get on public transport — for a half-an-hour-long journey to Harlem. Matt scoops close to Foggy, presses to his side, and puts his head on Foggy's shoulder. That's—he doesn't do that, usually. It's weird.

Foggy lets him.

He's always known about Matt's particular brand of distaste for the subway, but now he had the context for it and knew why. It wasn't claustrophobia, as he assumed initially, though he was fairly certain that was a contributing factor. But with Matt's heightened senses the subway must be hell: the smells, the noise, all those people crammed in one small confined space. Foggy didn't like the subway for those reasons, so it stood to think that Matt would hate it and be overwhelmed by it.

If it helps him to put his head on his friend's shoulder, Foggy wasn't about to deny him that. He rather preferred to think that Matt doing that showed that Matt trusted him to understand. And he did. Sort of. Tried to, at the very least, and therefore no one should criticise him for it.

He rests his cheek against the top of Matt's mop of damp dark hair, already curling at the end — seriously, Matt's hair is ridiculous, Foggy has witnessed it making a hairdresser cry — and takes Matt's hand in his. Turns it over, so that they're palm to palm. "You don't look well," he murmurs.
It's true enough, but has less to do with injuries — Matt doesn't have a lot of those, not in visible places at least, and the ones he has are old and yellowish — and more with the general look of a person who's not well-rested. "Long night?"

He hopes the answer is 'no' and for once someone must love him, because Matt sighs and says "No." Foggy feels good for about three seconds before Matt adds, "just... Couldn't sleep. Yesterday."

Which might have something to do with Foggy reading him all his files and research notes. And fuck, Foggy should have known it was a bad idea. Matt asked him to, so what. Matt didn't have the best instincts when it came to self-care and self-preservation, and was self-destructive enough to ask for something that could possibly fuck with his already crap mental state. It was Foggy's job to know better.

He was really bad at his job.

"Then it's a good thing there will be pie," Foggy tells him. "I have it on good authority that Grams made her famous pecan pie."

There is pie at Grams' house, a fact of which Matt informs him as they stand in front of Grams' door, waiting to be let in.

"It's ridiculous that you can smell that," Foggy murmurs.

"There's also tomato soup and I think there will be your grandmother's cheese and ham pancakes," Matt adds, grinning.

Foggy shakes his head fondly. "You're showing off."

Matt opens his mouth to say something, he's frowning and his fingers tap-tap a rhythm on his cane, but he doesn't, in the end, closes his mouth as Grams' door opens and they're faced with Grams in all her jeans-and-leather-clad glory.

"Frannie!" she exclaims and Foggy winces. She's one of only two people in his whole family that refuses to stop calling him that, and the other person is so irrelevant that it's not even worth remembering. "Oh, and Matthew, I'm so glad that you've made it."

She steps closer to them and throws her arms out, wraps one around the respective necks of each of them, and places one kiss first to Foggy's, then to Matt's temple.

"Thank you for inviting me, Mrs. Connor," Matt says once Grams lets him go. His cheeks are already way past pink. If this trend keeps up with both of Foggy's parents, Matt's going to end up red as a beetroot in seven minutes tops.

"Pff," Grams waves a hand dismissively, "you don't need to be invited, Matthew, you're practically family. You would be if Frannie here--"

"Happy birthday, Grams," Foggy interrupts her with the wishes, delivered perhaps a bit more forcefully than they ought to be. He fishes for the velvet box in his bag and takes it out. "We got something for you."

Grams takes the box. "That's a first time I was given a present in the doorway, but thank you, darlings, still." She finally steps back into the house and lets them in. "I'll open it after dinner, with the rest of the presents."

"Sure thing, Grams," Foggy says at the same time as Matt's "I hope you like this, Mrs. Connor".
Grams pats Matt's cheek. "Someone here has good manners," she says as she walks past them towards the living room, all the while glaring daggers at Foggy. Foggy only rolls his eyes. Grams' death stare stopped having an impact when he was a junior in high school.

"Boys!"

Anna Nelson bursts into the hall from the kitchen and charges at them. She's wearing an apron and her hands look like they're covered in flour — no, they're definitely covered in flour, she has some smudged on her left cheek too — and it still doesn't stop her from attempting to hug them to death. Correction, to hug Matt to death, because it's Matt that Anna envelopes in a tight hug and kisses on the forehead while Foggy stands behind them, tapping his foot like a bored and forgotten third wheel.

"Oh, Matty, hello." Anna smiles and cups Matt's cheeks, smearing the flour on them in the process. "It's so good to see you, sweetheart, it's been so long that I was beginning to worry that Franklin was keeping you away."

Matt stammers and doesn't manage to reply coherently. Beetroot level achieved, and he hasn't even said 'hello' to Foggy's dad yet.

"Hi, mum," Foggy waves at Anna behind Matt's back. "This is your son, Franklin Phillip, remember me? It's lovely to see you too, by the way."

Anna rolls her eyes. "I've seen you last week, Foggy. Matt I haven't seen in more than three months, let me enjoy the moment." She smiles at Matt again, despite knowing that Matt can't see it. But Matt has to somehow sense it, because he smiles back. He always smiles back at Anna, never misses a single smile, and it doesn't happen with anyone else, ever. Foggy's starting to wonder if his mother and Matt have some weird psychic connection going on. It would explain so much.

Anna eventually gets round to pecking Foggy on a cheek. But that's it, that's all Foggy gets. Anna truly does love Matt most. "I wouldn't go to the living room," she tells them when Matt takes Foggy's arm and Foggy starts them towards said room. "Unless you want to get stuck until dinner with Grams' hunting club friends."

They definitely don’t want to get stuck with Grams’ hunting club friends until dinner. Those are all elderly ladies, some of which Grams knows from way back when she used to live in the most Lovecraftian part of Massachusetts. Grams took him there for holiday once, when he was ten; they met up with some of Grams' friends and their equally terrified grandkids, and it was a horror. Still the creepiest moment of Foggy’s life.

“That’s not a good idea,” Foggy says slowly, thinking about Grams’ creepy hunting friends and their now grown-up grandkids. Grams and her friends would probably end up trying to either set him and Matt up with some of those grandkids — and they’re mostly really nice people, Foggy is Facebook friends with more than a half of them — or trying to convince them that spending two weeks a year in wilderness, in the middle of nothing, and having to hunt for your own food was good for the soul.

He knows which one Matt would consider worse.

“Candace is hiding upstairs,” Anna says, pointing at the staircase.

“And where’s dad?”

Anna’s lips twitch. “Mrs. Gershwin said there wasn’t enough beer and he volunteered to go and buy more,” she says. “I doubt he’ll be back within the next hour. You know that Grams’ friends creep
“Him and me both,” Foggy murmurs. He turns to Matt and tugs at his sleeve. “Come on,” he says. “Upstairs. It’s better to suffer Cande than the hunting club.”

They find Candace in the spare bedroom that Grams turned into a mini-library/study. It’s easily the nicest room in the whole house and Foggy loved to hide in here, surrounded by all the books, when he was younger. Even when he was Candace’s age, he’d still hole himself up here with a vacuum flask full of cocoa and go through Grams’ Stephen King collection.

Candace is not a Stephen King fan. She’s sitting with her knees bent on the windowsill, head bent over something that, judging by the cover that Foggy is able to peek at at this angle, is *The Big Book of Pain* that Grams got her for Christmas two years ago.

“Do you have some sort of a torture kink?” Foggy asks and that snaps Candace out of her little torture world. She raises her head and grins at them both when she notices them standing in the doorway.

“Mere curiosity,” she says, closing the book. “I’m thinking about going for pathology, it might be useful.”

Foggy makes a disgusted face. “Ugh, pathology. Do yourself a favour and choose something else, Cande, I’m saying this as a concerned older brother. Perhaps a fitness instructor? Can’t let all that cheerleading go to waste.”

She gives him the middle finger. Next to Foggy, Matt covers his mouth and coughs awkwardly, and that cough sounds more as if Matt was choking on a hot potato or was desperately trying not to laugh. It occurs to Foggy just then that Matt has just witnessed Foggy’s baby sister flipping him off and could actually see it, in his way. Perfect.

“Hi, Matt,” Candace greets Matt warmly. She doesn’t blush nor tugs at her hair with her eyes lowered, so Foggy takes it to mean that she truly is over the crush-on-brother’s-best-friend phase of her teen years. Jesus, they really grow up so fast.

“Hi, Candace.”

“Did you get ambushed by the hunting club ladies?”

“Nah.” Foggy shakes his head and settles down on the floor close to his sister, with his back against the half-wall. He pushes at the nearest chair with his foot and it skids closer to Matt, who nods his thanks and sits down as well. “We escaped before they swarmed us.”

“Lucky you.” Candace closes the book. “They grabbed me before dad told me to go and hide here. Mrs. Palomas’ oldest grandson just got divorced, she handed me six pictures of him and said that he’s a nice boy.”

“Stewie?” Foggy asks, to which Candace nods. “But he’s my age.”

Candace nods again. “That’s what I told her, that it’d be like going on a date with an ancient relic.” Matt laughs again. Traitor. And Cande, the asshole.

“Jerk,” Foggy mutters.

“Doof,” Candace shoots back. “Anyway, I told Mrs. Palomas that I’m currently not interested, and even if I were, it wouldn’t be in Stewie, I still remember that time he and you--“
“Okay, thank you for that,” Foggy interrupts her when he notices that Matt cocked his head in a manner that usually means that he’s interested. Tough luck, Foggy and Stewie’s weird adventures will have to remain a mystery for now. “How’s Tom?”

“Tom who?”

Foggy frowns. Was it Tim? No. He’s pretty sure Cande’s boyfriend was named Tom. “Tom, your boyfriend Tom. That Tom.”

“Oh.” Candace waves her hand. “Dumped his ass. He revealed himself to be a bigoted racist homophobe, I ain’t got time for someone like that. My youth’s precious, I’m not wasting it on him.”

“Good for you!” Foggy raises his hand and Candace gives him a high-five. She’ll be fine in college. And if she’s not, Matt’ll probably take it upon himself to make sure that she is if he finds out. Which probably won’t end well, for anyone involved, so Foggy should make sure that Matt doesn’t find out.


The frown deepens. “I think your mum’s calling you.”

He says it the exact same moment Anna yells, most likely from the stairs, “FRANKLIN NELSON! COME HERE THIS INSTANT!”

Candace snickers. “Yeah, Foggy, your mum’s calling you.”

Foggy gets up with a groan. “Assholes, the lot of you.”

He exits the study and goes downstairs, where he barely manages not to collide with Mrs. Gershwin and her beer bottle. He excuses himself and darts into the relative safety of Grams’ kitchen, which incidentally is the second-largest room in the whole house. Life priorities according to Joy Connor.

“What?” he asks his mother.

Anna doesn’t look amused. “I’ve been calling you.”

“Well, excuse me, I’ve only been catching up with the one family member that seems happy to see me.” Anna rolls her eyes and turns back towards the counter. “So. Tom?”

“Ugh.” Anna shudders. “Don’t even remind me of that kid. I’m so glad your sister was smart enough to dump his sorry ass.”

Foggy shoves hands into the pockets of his jeans. “She wasn’t smart enough not to date him in the first place.”

Anna takes two mugs out of the overhead cupboard and fills them with drinks. “Not everyone can have such a good taste when it comes to partners as you do,” she says, casually.

“Yeah,” Foggy agrees before the whole meaning of that sentence dawns on him. Good taste? What? He squints his eyes. “You never liked Marci.”

She somehow manages to fit six pistachio cupcakes on the tiniest plate Foggy’s ever seen. “Marci’s an exception.”

“You weren’t overly fond of Debs either.”
She shrugs and turns back to him, and finally takes a proper look at him. She must not like what she saw, because she frowns. “Are you alright, honey?” she asks, concerned. “You look--pale.”

That would be the result of months of worry about Matt and the more recent hard work and sleepless nights and coffee and anger that went into his research. “I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?” Anna presses. “Perhaps something’s wrong, when was the last time--“

“I’m fine, mum.”

“Franklin, and what if it’s b--“

“Mum,” Foggy interrupts her. Why do people keep insisting on trying to talk to him about things he doesn’t want to talk about. “I have an appointment scheduled for next month. I’m fine, just tired, we have lots of work. Can we please not talk about this here, now? Grams has guests.”

She squints. “Foggy, everyone here--“

“Not everyone.”

She squints harder. And then it hits her, what he means, and her eyes widen in surprise. “Franklin,” she hisses, “are you lying to him?”

Foggy huffs, irritated. “I’m not lying, mum, I just never said, it’s never been relevant--“

“So you’re waiting for it to become relevant?” she carries on in that hissing tone. “That’s ridiculous, Franklin, I’m disappointed--“

“It was never important, and Matt has worse problems anyway.” If only she knew just how much worse. “Can we argue about this later, when there aren’t twenty people around to overhear?”

“Franklin--“

“Mother. Seriously. Later.”

She sighs dramatically and raises her hands in defeat. “Fine,” she snaps. She turns to the counter, picks the mugs and hands them to him. “Honey rose tea, for you and Matt.” She turns back again and takes the tiny plate. “And cupcakes for the three of you.”

“Thanks, mum.”

She waves her hand. “Just go.”

He balances the plate full of cupcakes on top of one of the mugs and manages to get it upstairs without dropping anything, thank God for the practice he had while working part-time at a restaurant while in high school.

“Mum sends her love in the form of baked goods,” he announces loudly as he pushes the door open and walks back into the study. He’s greeted by two cut-off giggles. Matt moved closer to Candace, and they’re sitting with their heads bowed towards each other and are laughing under their breaths. Great. Just great.

“Did you and Stewie Morris really dress up as Sailor Moon characters for Halloween?” Matt asks. He’s trying to keep a straight face, he really is, so kudos for that.

“Yes we did,” Foggy admits and Matt cracks. Which is funny in itself, because Foggy’s not entirely
sure Matt even knows what do the Sailor Moon costumes look like. “And it was awesome. I’m handing you a mug,” he says. “Honey rose tea, because mum likes you better.”

“Thanks,” Matt says and takes the mug. His fingers brush Foggy’s and he smiles. “Why Sailor Moon?”

Foggy shrugs. Matt probably expects an answer like ‘I lost a bet’ or ‘it was a dare’. It’s neither. “Because why the hell not?”

“Holy shit,” Candace says suddenly.

“Me being into anime is hardly a revelation, Cande,” Foggy says, rolling his eyes. But Candace’s not looking at him, or at Matt, even. She’s staring out of the window and at the street.

“It’s not that,” she breathes, and she’s pressing her face so close to the window that the glass fogs. “It’ just--I think--Dick’s here.”

Foggy frowns and moves closer to the window. “You mean great-uncle Richard? Isn’t he dead?”

“Not great-uncle Dick, he’s most definitely dead. It’s Grandpa Asshole.”

“No way,” Foggy breathes. He presses closer to Candace, to look out of the window as well. “It can’t be.”

“It is.”

“Grandpa Asshole?” Matt asks.

Foggy and Candace share a look. Right, Matt doesn’t know the story of Grandpa Asshole. Foggy waves his hand at Candace, giving her permission to share this story.

“So you know Grandfather Nelson, right?” is what she starts with. Matt nods. Of course he knows Grandfather Nelson, he went on family holiday with Foggy and Cande during the summer break between years two and three, and he had the pleasure of meeting Grandfather Nelson and being subjected to his hardcore fishing lessons. “Well, people tend to have two grandfathers.”

“I’m aware,” Matt replies, clearly amused.

“Grandpa Asshole is Grams’ douchebag ex-husband,” Candace says and Foggy has to fight the urge to moan. She blew the story, like, for God’s sake, Candace, how could you blow it, such a story.

“See, Grams used to live in Massachusetts,” Foggy picks the story up, because clearly Candace is not to be trusted with it. “She had this husband. Weird guy, kept creepy company and would disappear for days on end into the woods or the mountains.”

“Okay.”

“So eventually Grams has had enough. She kicked the dude out, divorced him and moved to New York,” Foggy continues, skipping for now all the stories of Grandpa Ray teaching Mum to punch people when she was four. He’ll fill Matt in later. “Ray disappeared completely for years and everyone thought that was the last they’d seen of him.”

“But bitch it wasn’t the last they’d seen of him,” Candace picks up. “Sadly, It’s a dark family secret, Matt. Grandpa Asshole pops up once every few years, appears out of the blue, annoys the hell out of half of us, offends the other half, and then disappears again. For example, he came to mum’s
wedding. It almost resulted in the whole thing being called off.”

“Next time he shows up, I’m five,” Foggy says. “I think Grams threatened him with her hunting knives then, but I’m a bit fuzzy on the details. Maybe I imagined that.”

“Next time was when Foggy was thirteen and I was two,” Candace chips in. “Ray comes over, saying that he was ‘in the neighbourhood’ for some reason—“

“It was before we moved to Princeton,” Foggy clarifies, “so at the time we were still living in Hell’s Kitchen.”

“--and offers to take us to the park. Mum was less than thrilled with the idea.”

“She pulled a shotgun on him.”

Matt’s jaw drops. “What?”

Candace laughs. “We shit you not. I swear, that’s my earliest memory, mum running after Ray with a shotgun. She still owned one, at the time. It was so badass.”

“Then Ray completely ignored us for the next, what, fifteen years? Eighteen. Eighteen years.”

“He called a few months back, actually. Apparently something chased him to New York again.” Candace shrugs. “I don’t know what he wanted, I told him to fuck off and hang up.”

“He’s an awful, creepy guy that everyone hates,” Foggy sums up. “Never gave a single shit about us. In fact I’m fairly certain that he’s incapable of experiencing any higher emotion.”

“And he’s here, now,” Matt says.

“Yup,” Candace confirms.

“Apparently,” Foggy says. Something occurs to him. “Someone should probably go downstairs and check on mum and Grams. With dad still out on the prolonged beer run, there’s no one to make sure everyone leaves alive. We don’t need any casualties today. You’d all expect me and Matt to defend you pro bono and we can’t afford that.”

“You’re older,” Candace notes, the ever-helpful Candace, “and heavier, you go.”

“You’ve seen Ray less times,” Foggy points out. “Plus all you’d need to do is call the cops, that doesn’t require you having such a tactical advantage over him.”

“He called me this year while you haven’t interacted with him in almost twenty years,” she bristles. And pouts. God damn that pout of hers. “We should rock, paper, scissors it.”

“Fine.”

They do. Foggy loses, because of course he loses. The universe doesn’t like him for some reason.

“How,” Foggy grumbles as he leaves the study. There’s a commotion downstairs. He can hear Mrs. Palomas cursing.

“You always use scissors first,” Matt tells him.

“No, I don’t.”
“You do,” Matt laughs. “And I’m telling you this as a blind person. If I noticed that, your sister did too.”

“And it never occurred to you to maybe tell me about that a bit earlier?” Foggy asks and Matt snickers, presses his palm to his mouth to hide the giggle.

The voices coming from downstairs become louder as they move towards the staircase and walk down the stairs as quietly as they can.

“--not welcome in my house. Get out, Raymond.” That’s Grams, breaking out her most authoritative tone of voice. Go Grams.

Foggy’s standing with one foot on the landing already, and Matt’s halfway down the stairs behind him, when Ray moves into their line of sight. Foggy’s, Foggy’s line of sight. Ray is—as unimpressive as ever. Hair as white as always and in as much disarray, cane, glasses, clothes that have clearly seen better times. And that goddamn smirk that makes Foggy want to punch him every time he sees it. It’s the reason Foggy doesn’t smirk, goes either full-on smile or nothing at all: Foggy has the same expression when he tries to, his lips curve the same way Ray’s do, and Foggy already looks enough like Ray without having to add another layer of similarity by adopting the same mannerism. Foggy’s spent two years of his early teens practicing different expressions in front of a mirror, hoping to pick some that make him look as unlike Ray as humanly possible.

“What, I can’t wish my wife happy birthday?” Ray sneers, because he’s an absolute and utter asshole, God, Foggy hates him, Foggy hates him almost as much as he hates Stick. ‘Almost’ being the operative word here, because Stick is a miserable evil goddamn bastard while Ray is just—Ray is a douchebag and an asshole, was a crap and violent husband and even a worse father, but he never ascended to quite the same plane of pure evilness as Stick did.

“Ex-wife,” Grams spits out.

“Dad,” Anna says as she grabs the sleeve of Ray’s shirt, squeezes his arm “leave. Or I’ll call the police, I swear I will.”

“Stick,” Matt whispers behind Foggy, and he sounds gutted. "No."

“What?” He heard wrong. Must have. Foggy turns his head towards Matt as he asks the question, and it almost dies on his lips. Matt’s gone pale and he’s gripping the railing so hard that his knuckles have gone white.

“Stick,” Matt repeats, louder.

There are two other people, besides Foggy — who feels as if someone just snatched the floor from under his feet — that react to that one word. Grams turns her head towards Matt and her expression clouds with anger and suspicion, and Ray… Ray grins.

“Matt,” he says with fake cheer in his voice, “I didn’t expect to see you here, kid.”

He wrenches his arm out of Anna’s grip, nods Grams goodbye and leaves, slamming the door shut on his way out.

The absolute silence that settled in the hallway lasts about a minute. The same minute it takes Foggy to jump over that last step, make it to the door and out, run after Ray, heedless of Anna’s perplexed calls.

Stick, Stick, Stick, is the only thought that’s clear to him, the only thing he can focus on. I’ll kill you,
"I'll kill you, I'll fucking kill you."

***

Ray must be fueled by hatred and misery and pure evilness, because he's fast for a ninety-year-old — he's almost at the end of the street by the time Foggy catches up with him. He knows that Foggy's coming, he must know, but he doesn't react, doesn't show that he knows, doesn't slow down or speed up in hopes of running away. Which he could do, he's already walking fast, if he sped up he'd be able to get away. But he doesn't. It's like he doesn't care.

One thing happens when Foggy does catch up with him, and it's something that Foggy'll be proud of for years to come, a fond memory to replay when things look bleak and life is crap and everyone needs a little pick-me-up.

Foggy clenches his fist and runs a little faster. "Hey, grandpa!" he calls out.

The use of that word over Ray's name — or the number of derogative monikers that Grams devised for him over the years — stops him dead in his tracks. He turns around, face alight with curiosity, and that split-second pause allows Foggy to collide with him at full speed and to drive his fist into Ray's — creepy, disgusting, so similar to his own — face.

Foggy is not a violent person. Sure, he's been in a fistfight once or twice, last time in sixth grade, with Brett of all people, but he's never been particularly good at fighting. He's not a violent person as a general rule, because Ray has always been a violent person and being unlike Ray has been one of his top life priorities ever since he turned seven and could comprehend just what kind of a douchebag his grandfather was. So. Violence is the measure of last resort, but this is a last resort type of a situation, and Foggy regrets nothing as he lands his fist square in Ray's face.

The sound of bones breaking is just an added bonus.

Ray staggers back and his hand flies to his nose immediately. Someone on the street yells "what the fuck, bruh!", but Foggy's not listening to them, blood is pounding in his ears, there's blood trickling from between Ray's fingers and he looks so goddamn surprised. Didn't see that one coming, did you, Ray.

Ray is still clutching at his nose with one hand, holding his cane with the other — Foggy does briefly think about what Grams' neighbours will say about seeing her grandson beating up a clearly blind elderly man, but decides that a) he doesn't fucking care, and more importantly b) Grams will be proud of him no matter what — when Foggy makes a move to grab him by the lapels and then...shake him? punch him again? punch him until he cries about how sorry he is? Yeah, something like that.

Only Foggy never gets to do any of that, because this isn't merely Ray, his creepy asshole grandfather whom Foggy hates, this is Stick, goddamn motherfucking bastard Stick, blind ninja master Stick, whom Foggy hates even more. Being a ninja master clearly means something, though, because the moment Foggy moves his arms, Ray drops his cane and counters the move, batting Foggy's hands away. He sidesteps Foggy and moves behind him, grabs his arm and twists it behind Foggy's back, pulls Foggy's hand by the wrist so far up that it makes the shoulder strain at the socket. With his other hand he pins Foggy's other arm to his side in a strong iron-like grip that no ninety-year-old should possess.

"What's got into you, Frannie?" he hisses and yet somehow makes it sound almost concerned. He's the most despicable being Foggy has ever encountered, Wilson Fisk included.
"You fucking bastard," Foggy spits out. "You goddamn fucking--"

"Language, Frannie."

"Let me go."

Ray pulls harder at his wrist. He'll dislocate Foggy's shoulder at this rate if he tugs again. "No."

"I know what you did, you bastard," Foggy grits out. "And I'll end you for that."

"So Matty shared. Nice to be remembered, I guess." Foggy struggles to break free, to break Ray's hold on him and turn around, and wrap his hands around Ray's throat and squeeze, but Ray's grip is like a vice. "Give him up, Frannie."

With that, he lets go of both of Foggy's arms, relaxes his grip and shoves Foggy away. Foggy trips, but catches his balance before he ends up nose-first on the pavement. He spins on his heel to face Ray, who looks worse than usual, at least. Blood's no longer running down his face, but his nose is clearly broken. Small things, Foggy, appreciate small things.

Foggy barks out a laugh. "You're shitting me, right?"

"Nothing good ever happens to people in Matt Murdock's life. He's trouble, kid," Ray informs him calmly, "even more so with what's coming. It's for your own damn good."

"Like you fucking care."

"I do care."

"I don't believe you," Foggy snaps.

"I don't need you to believe me." Ray stomps his foot, brings it down on one end of his cane, propelling the thing into air. He catches it mid-fall with a practiced ease. He grins at Foggy, as if expecting applause for a neat trick. "Give him up or I'll make you give him up."

"Like hell." Foggy clenches his fist again, draws his arm back, preparing to throw a punch. Ray catches his fist in front of his face, shakes his head sadly as if disappointed. Well boo-fucking-hoo.

"I'll kill you," Foggy tells him, venom and spite pretty much dripping from every word, "if you ever get close to him again. For Matt, I'll kill you, I promise."

Ray considers him for a moment before smiling. "I believe you," he says simply. He pushes Foggy's still clenched fist back at him. "If you're so concerned about him, maybe you should find out how your friend's doing, mhm? If that's even what he is."

He wipes the rest of the blood on his sleeve, taps his cane against the ground once and turns away. Foggy observes his retreating back for a moment before smiling. "I believe you," he says simply. He pushes Foggy's still clenched fist back at him. "If you're so concerned about him, maybe you should find out how your friend's doing, mhm? If that's even what he is."

He throws the front door open and barges into the house, yelling, "Matt!"

There's almost no one left at the house. Grams' hunting friends have clearly left, maybe on their own, maybe Grams made them leave. Anna he can hears pacing in the kitchen, still agitated, talking on the
phone in a hushed tone with whom Foggy assumes is his dad, but might also be Bess Mahoney, technically. Cande's nowhere to be seen, so perhaps she's still in the study upstairs, blissfully out of this clusterfuck of a situation.

Where hopefully Matt is too, maybe less blissful but safe.

"Matt!" he calls again, while going for the stairs.

"Franklin," Grams says. She's standing in the living room doorway and inclines his head, inviting him in.

He shakes his head. "Not now, Grams, okay, I've gotta--"

"Now, Franklin."

She grabs his arm and drags him into the living room, closing the door behind her. That's never a good sign, and Foggy swallows thickly. Grams is a firm believer in being open about everything and in not keeping secrets from the people you love. It's a rule of hers that Foggy's always cherished, he should really learn how to spell 'hypocrite', shouldn't he, but so should she, to be perfectly honest.

"What the hell were you thinking?" she hisses. Foggy winces. Well, there goes his hope of Grams being proud. He takes a breath and prepares to explain when she continues, "do you know how hard I've worked to keep you, your mother, your sister, away from all his shit? And you bring all of that into my house."

He shakes his head to clear it. He's not actually hearing what he thinks he's hearing. "What?"

"I promised myself that my child would not be a part of the Chaste's shitfest, not like Ray and I were," she carries on as if Foggy hasn't spoken. "I did everything to protect you from that and you go and bring one of his into our lives! For God's sake, Frannie, you don't even realise how dangerous those people are!"

"One of his?!" Foggy gapes. "What the hell, Grams, that's Matt. You know Matt, you've known him for five years!"

"Exactly!" She points a finger at Foggy accusingly. "God only knows what he told him about us in that time!"

"What he tol--Matt's not a spy!" The sole thought is outrageous. What the hell. "You're being ridiculous! Matt didn't know, he didn't even know! I didn't know! Fucking Christ, I'm gonna be sick."

"You can't be sure of that!" She throws her hands up in exasperation. "He's one of Ray's! 'Stick', only the Chaste calls him that, so he is, he must be! They're all dangerous people, Frannie, nothing good ever happens to people associated with them!"

"Matt's not one of Stick's anything!" Foggy's yelling now too, full volume. "They haven't even spoken in almost twenty years! He abandoned Matt! He ruined Matt's life and he abandoned him!" Foggy runs a hand through his hair. "Fucking hell, Grams, what the fuck, are you even listening to yourself? You know Matt! You love Matt! And you wouldn't even be saying this if you knew what he--"

He stops. Snaps his mouth shut. No. It's not his secret, it's not his secret to tell. He shouldn't even know about it, the fact that he does was a mere miserable fucking chance. Foggy closes his eyes and pinches the bridge of his nose. He takes a few breaths, trying to calm himself down. Jesus fuck, he
never took Grams for a paranoid psycho. He hopes Matt's not focusing too hard on the argument
downstairs and can't hear Grams' accusations. They're ridiculous. She's acting ridiculous.

A sharp intake of breath makes him open his eyes and glance at Grams. She's staring at him with
something akin to comprehension. "Ray trained him, didn't he?" she asks quietly. It's almost eerie
after all the shouting of the last few minutes, to hear her so quiet and composed. Foggy nods and the
comprehension turns into apprehension turns into deep regret. Regret now, just great. Grams slumps
onto an armchair. She looks defeated. "My God." She covers her mouth with her hand. "What have I
done."

Dread settles over Foggy. "What have you done?" he asks slowly, aware that he won't like the
answer.

Grams shakes her head mutely. So no answer there, after all. Foggy strides over to the door and
opens it, walks back into the hallway. He'll go upstairs, he'll get Matt, they'll talk, they'll--

"Foggy?" Candace asks. She's standing on the last step of the stairs and she's holding Matt's cane in
her hands. Candace is holding Matt's cane.

"Where's Matt?"

"He left," she says. "After you went after Ray, Grams dragged him away and they argued..." She
makes a face. "Well, more like Grams yelled at him. And he just--ran off. Out of the house and--
away. He left his cane here." She looks down at the item in question. "What happened?"

"You better ask Grams," Foggy says grimly.

Candace steps off the stairs and hands him Matt's cane. "He left his cane here," she repeats. "Is he--Is
he going to be okay?"

She means without the cane, obviously, because she doesn't know that Matt can, if needed, operate
without it just fine. But that's not what Foggy means when he answers.

"I don't know," he tells her as he takes the cane. "I hope so."

"You'll find him, right?" Candace asks.

"Yes," Foggy answers. Then, in a sudden surge of emotion for his stupid but so caring little sister, he
drags her closer and presses a kiss to her forehead. Then he grips Matt's cane tighter and exits the
house once more.

Outside, it started raining again. He looks around, left and right, but Matt's not sitting on any
doorsteps or benches. He's nowhere in sight. "MATT!" he yells, but doesn't have any particular hope
that Matt'll hear him.

There's no answer, predictably. Matt might be, theoretically, ignoring him, but he might not be
anywhere near here anymore. Foggy folds Matt's cane under his arm and begins his fast-paced walk
towards the subway station, towards line C that'll take him right back to Matt's apartment, where
Matt hopefully is.

Foggy doesn't want to think about the alternative.

***

"Matt!" he shouts, pounding on Matt’s door. “MATT! Matt, come on!”
He pauses and presses his ear to the door. Nothing. No sound, no movement, no nothing, zero, nada, zilch. It’s not a good sign. It might mean that Matt’s not inside, it might mean that he was inside but then left and that would be a Very Bad Thing.

Or maybe Matt’s hiding in his bedroom, huddled on the bed or in a corner, pretending not to hear Foggy and his calls, hoping that if he doesn’t answer the door, doesn’t make his presence known, Foggy will give up and leave.

Foggy will never ever give up on Matt.

“Matt!” Foggy knocks hard three more times. “Matt, it’s me, please open the door. Please, we need to--We need to talk, please, Matty.”

Still nothing. Time for Plan B. Mind made up, Foggy reaches into his bag and fishes out his set of keys to Matt’s apartment. He fumbles with finding the right one, then with pushing it into the keyhole. He turns it and the lock clicks open; Foggy opens the door and walks inside.

“Matt?” he asks into the quiet of the apartment.

No response. It appears no one is home. And it doesn’t look like anyone’s been home either. On the off-chance that Matt did something very much unlike him that's rash and irresponsible — because there is no precedent of Matt Murdock doing dumb and dangerous and reckless things on impulse, no sir, absolutely not — Foggy walks over to the cupboard under the stairs, takes the key from the under the hose, and opens the door. He holds his breath as he lifts the lid of the chest and peeks inside, then exhales slowly when he sees the Daredevil costume still inside.

And then gets scared again, because the fact that the costume is here doesn't mean Matt hasn't gone off to therapeutically beat up some criminals. He did use to go out in something that offered less protection than paintball gear.

Foggy closes the chest, closes the door and locks it, hides the key in its place, and moves to sit on Matt's new couch. It isn't as soft as the previous one, is much more uncomfortable and sleeping on it will be a pain.

He resolves to wait there until Matt comes back home.

***

*Hey, Matt, it's me. I'm at your place, I let myself in, sorry about that. We need to talk, buddy, please call me back.*

***

*Me again. Matt, if this is about whatever my grandmother said to you, it doesn't matter. Don't listen to her, she's full of crap right now. I don't care what she said, but we really need to talk. I'm still at your place, I'm waiting for you. I made pancakes, your favourite, as we didn't actually get to eat anything at the party. See you soon.*

***

Two hours later and he's still waiting.

***

*Matt, it's me again. It's been three hours since you left Grams' house, where are you, buddy? Please
When the third hour comes and goes, he begins to worry that Matt's not going to come back home.

Me. Again. Which you probably already know. I just--I get it, you don't want to talk to me right now. It's fine. I'm going back to my place, so it's safe for you to go back home, I won't be there. Just please, call me or text me when you get there, I want to know you got there safely.

Matt. Matty, where are you? You're freaking me out, are you okay? Please, please call me, I don't know what's going on or where you are, please, I need to know that you're safe.

The sound of someone knocking on his door snaps him out of his reverie. He looks around his apartment for a moment, dazed, before connecting the sound with his front door. Matt, is his immediate thought, and he leaps off the couch and makes it to the front door, which he opens with too much force. But it's not Matt waiting for him on the other side.

"You can't possibly tell me that you've been talking to someone for the past five hours," Jess tells him. She puts her hand on his chest and pushes him back, unceremoniously inviting herself in. She's holding a folder in her hand, one much thicker than the last one she gave Foggy.

"I've been trying to reach someone for the past five hours," he tells her as he closes the door behind her. When he gets back to his living room, Jess is already sitting on his couch, legs crossed, one brow arched.

"Boyfriend troubles?"

"He's not my boyfriend," Foggy says tiredly.

Jess tsks. "But it is about him." Foggy doesn't deny it, but doesn't confirm either. Jess sighs and pats the folder which she'd put on the coach next to her. "I've been trying to call you all day," she says. "I have--something. Not sure if you're going to like it, but hey, I'm a private investigator, if I got paid for information people liked, I'd starve to death."

She takes the folder and opens it, skims through the documents there. "It's confidential SHIELD info, so again, if anyone comes to arrest you, I was not involved. I'd hate to get on the wrong side of SHIELD and their Index."

"If anyone comes to arrest me, I don't know you," Foggy says. Truth be told, if anyone came to arrest him, they'd probably come because of a certain horned vigilante, not his P. I. neighbour.

"So remember when I texted you yesterday that your Stick's American?" Foggy nods. God. He cannot believe it was only yesterday. "There's a name attached to him in SHIELD's confidential database. By the way, for an espionage agency that suffered a crippling leak of all their documents last year, they have a lot of files that are confidential and sealed and haven't been leaked."

"SHIELD's keeping secrets from SHIELD, somehow I'm not surprised."
Jess nods. She clears her throat and flips some pages. "So. Your Stick. Born in 1924 in Bangor, Maine, under the legal name of Raymond Connor." Here Jess makes a small pause to gauge his reaction. "I didn't think much of it at first, not until I saw his marriage certificate, to one Joy Connor, née Meachum, and the birth certificate of his only daughter, Anna Faith Connor. That piqued my curiosity, as I recognised that name. So I checked." She takes a deep breath. "I'm sorry about this, I really am. But Stick's daughter Anna Faith Connor incidentally happens to be the same Anna Faith Connor who in 1979 married Edward Phillip Nelson. The same Anna Faith Nelson who happens to be your mother."

She closes the folder and patiently waits for him to react to the news. The lack of shouting and anger and denial must make her suspicious, because her eyes narrow. "But you already knew that."

"I--" Foggy runs a hand over his face. Fuck, he's tired. He can't believe that it's only been thirty hours since Jess visited him last, bringing the news of the Chaste and of crazy ninja death cults, and since Foggy talked her into finding out more. "I found out today. Stick--Ray came to my grandmother's birthday party."

Jess swears colourfully. "Fuck," she says. "Does it mean there's a conflict of interests here?"

Foggy frowns. "What?"

"Your case." Jess points at the high tower made of Foggy's research notes. "You've been working so hard on it, fuck. This is awful."

"Yeah."

Jess stands up and starts pacing. "But you don't have to resign, right?" she asks. "A conflict of interests exists if there's a risk that you would misrepresent your client because of your own interests, correct?"

"More or less," Foggy confirms. "There has to exist a substantial risk that the lawyer’s representation of the client would be materially and adversely affected by the lawyer’s own interests or by the lawyer’s duties to another current client, former client, or a third person. But Jess--"

"SHIELD's files painted Ray Connor as a pretty much an absentee father and grandfather, and a complete asshole, so I suppose you don't feel particularly attached to the guy," Jess carries on, both the talking and the pacing, completely ignoring Foggy for the time being. "So you could still helm that case." She stops and looks at him. "I mean, the parents hired you for a reason, and sure, part of it was probably the fact that your firm is new and cheap and you really need clients. But you--you actually care about this case, about justice, and that's fucking rare. I wouldn't want you to back out and I bet the parents wouldn't want it either."

"I'm not going to drop the case," Foggy tells her firmly. He's not. This, this changes nothing for him. It's still about Matt. He's doing this for Matt. He doesn't care if it's Grandpa Asshole Ray that he'll be putting in jail now, not just a faceless Stick figure. It makes him no difference. And it's not like anyone will shed a tear after the douchebag. Not his Mum, not Candace, not Grams, definitely not Foggy. Good riddance, Ray. Or not. Yeah, let's go with 'not'."

"Good."

And then Jess does something unexpected. She strides over to Foggy and throws her hands around his neck, hugging him tightly. Foggy is momentarily too stunned to respond, but reflexively wraps his own arms around her. It's kind of nice, he decides. Not as nice as hugging Matt, but still nice. Jess is--Jess is a nice person.
"You're a good guy, Nelson," she tells him. "A genuinely good guy. If you ever need help, with anything, Alias Investigations will be happy to help."

"Thank you, Jessica." Jess smiles. "And it's 'Foggy'. Friends get to call me 'Foggy'."

"Weird, but cute. Does it mean I'm now the kind of friend your not-boyfriend is?" she jokes. She then pats him on the arm awkwardly and steps away. Turns around and goes for his front door. When she gets there, she stops and turns her head to look at him once more. "I'm glad you're not going to drop this case due to ethical reasons or whatever. Because your client, that kid? They deserve someone who cares. They deserve to grow up knowing that the bastard that hurt them is going to rot in prison for the rest of his sorry life."

"Yeah," Foggy says quietly. "They do."

Jess nods at him and leaves his apartment. Foggy sinks back onto the coach and hides his face in his hands.

***

Matty, it's me. I hope you're going to listen to all these messages and won't just delete them. I just wanted to say--

Message deleted.

***

Foggy picks up the moment his phone buzzes, without looking at the caller id. "Matt?"

"You haven't talked with him yet?" Grams asks and Foggy tries not to feel disappointed and angry, but he does.

"No," he tells her. "He's not picking up my calls."

"Damnit. Frannie, when you reach him, please tell him that I'm very, very sorry, that I overreacted and I regret that."

"Perhaps you should tell him yourself," Foggy says coldly and hangs up.

***

Hey, Matty, me again. We don't have to talk if you don't want to. I just--I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry for everything. I wish you'd pick up because I'm worried about you, I don't know where you are, I don't know if you're okay. I need to know that you're safe. But we don't have to talk, I understand that you don't want to. I'll, I'll stop calling, just this one more time. I hope I'll see you at work tomorrow. I love you, please, please be safe, Matt.

***

'One more time' is much easier said than done, Foggy realises half an hour later.

***

He dials Matt's number fully expecting the call to go to voicemail like all the previous ones. What he doesn't expect is to hear a muffled mechanical voice repeating his name over and over again close-by. Matt's phone. No way. Foggy lowers his own phone, thinking that he's imagining things, but no, he can still hear it, a repetition of Foggy, Foggy, Foggy, barely there, but there. His call goes to
voicemail, so Foggy kills it and dials again. And there, he can hear it, on his right, coming from the direction of the half-open window--

by the fire escape.

Foggy disconnects and drops his phone, walks over to the window and opens it, sticks his head out. The pouring rain makes it hard to see and he has to squint, but he makes out a silhouette of a man, huddled on the opposite end of the platform, under Mr. Graham's window, hidden away from view and invisible from Foggy's apartment.

"Matt," he says and somehow manages to sound both concerned and relieved.

No reaction. Foggy frowns and opens the window wider, hauls himself over and onto the fire escape. He approaches Matt slowly, like a skittish animal; once closer, he notices that Matt's wearing the same jeans and shirt he did to Grams', and that he's shivering. He's sitting with his back propped by the railings, has his knees drawn up to his chest and his arms wrapped around them. He's not blue, but it's a close thing. And he doesn't have his glasses.

"Hey." Foggy crouches in front of him, hoping to any deity available that Mr. Graham doesn't decide to glance outside his window just now and doesn't mistake them for burglars. "Matt, hey."

Matt blinks and turns his head towards Foggy's voice. His movements are slow, sluggish. God knows how long he's been here. "Foggy?"

"Yeah," Foggy breathes. "Come on, Matt, it's cold, it's raining, you can't sit on my fire escape all night, even though it's a very nice fire escape. So up, Murdock." He puts his hands under Matt's arms and hauls him into a standing position. Matt sways a bit and Foggy is hit with a horrible sense of déjà vu. He's been in this situation before, not so long ago.

"Cold," Matt murmurs.

"Yeah," Foggy repeats, a little choked up. "We're going inside, okay, we'll be home in a second and I'll get you something warm to wear, we'll warm you up."

Matt hums instead of answering.

Foggy guides him towards his window and helps him into the apartment. He deposits Matt on the coach and immediately closes the window, turns up the heating, and rushes to his bedroom to dig through his clothes in search of his warmest, fluffiest sweater and sweatpants. He comes back to the living room to find Matt unbuttoning his sodden shirt, his movements still sluggish, but at least he's not unresponsive. He hands Matt the sweatpants and the sweater — it will be too big for him, will hang loosely on Matt's thinner frame — and goes into the kitchenette to prepare tea.

"Thank you," Matt says quietly.

Foggy takes a steadying breath. "I've been calling you," he says as calmly as he can.

"I know."

"Where were you," Foggy glances at his watch, "for the past seven hours?"

"I needed to clear my head."

That probably doesn't mean anything good. It might mean daredevilling. "Did you go parkouring in jeans and a shirt?" Foggy asks. He tries not to imagine the hundred accidents that might have
happened and fails miserably.

"I needed to clear my head," Matt repeats, which isn't a confirmation, but isn't a denial either.

"I was worried."

"I know," Matt admits. He curls on the coach with his legs drawn up again, and wraps himself tighter in the sweater, half-hides his face in the fluffy material of it. "I listened to your messages."

"Then why didn't you call me back?" The kettle starts whistling and Foggy takes it off the cooker. He throws a bag of some sort of vegan green tea or similar crap that Matt loves into a mug and pours boiling water. "For that matter, why didn't you just break into my house as usual? Why did you sit outside in such a downpour?"

"I wasn't sure you'd want me." Matt folds himself even further, which Foggy didn't think possible. "Is your grandmother very angry?"

Foggy has to shake his head, because there's no way he's hearing this right. "What?"

"I didn't know," Matt says, so softly and quietly that Foggy has to move closer to hear him. "I didn't know. I didn't know, but even if I did, I'd never--I never told--I was never spying on you, you have to--"

Matt's hugging his knees and his expression is downright miserable. He's close to tears, Foggy can tell. "Of course I believe you," Foggy says, using his most authoritative, take-no-shit tone. "And fuck what my grandmother says, she might be a paranoid old hag after all." It's not exactly fair to Grams, who's definitely not a hag even if she is a bit paranoid. "And fuck Ray too, he did that on purpose, he's an evil miserable goddamn motherfucking bastard whose only joy in life is manipulating and emotionally tormenting people. He's always been like that, so fuck Ray."

"So are we," Matt hesitates, God, he sounds so fucking hopeful, "are we okay?"

Foggy sits down on the coach next to Matt, careful not to touch him. He's not sure how Matt'd react, and as far as he's concerned, right now? No express permission or express desire means no touching.

"I don't know," Foggy tells him and Matt's expression crumbles like a house of cards that's been built on unsteady ground. "Are we? Are we okay from your side?"

Matt frowns. "What do you mean?"

"I've told you how I feel. Fuck Grams, fuck Ray, fuck any and all haters. You're my best friend, you're my family, I love you, nothing's gonna change that. I'm with you for better or worse. But what about how do you feel? Can you--"

Foggy stops. He's not sure how to finish that sentence. For a split second he wanted to say 'can you forgive me?', but that wouldn't be fair, to either him or Matt. Neither of them knew. Foggy didn't lie to Matt, not about this. 'Can you live with this?' Sounds awful.

"Can you even stand the sight of me now, now that you do know?"

"The fact that I can't see probably helps," Matt says and there's a small, shy smile playing on his lips. And yeah, Foggy walked right into that one, and not even on purpose, Matt saw — oh Christ, they're hilarious tonight — a chance and took it. It's a good sign, cracking their usual dumb blind jokes.

"You're hilarious," Foggy says, voicing his thoughts. The shy smile gets a tad bigger. Foggy takes a
"Communication, Matt, we've talked about it. Tell me what you need and I'll do it, even if it's me getting the hell away. Because I need to know that you're okay."

"I need you," Matt whispers. "I can't lose you. You make me better."

"And what about me now? There isn't much I can do, realistically, except for maybe officially disowning Ray, but that won't change the fact that he and I share roughly 25% of DNA." God, that thought makes him sick. "Are you going to be okay with me?"

Matt doesn't nod immediately; he actually takes his time thinking about the question, he gives it some thought and that's progress, because for once Matt Murdock is thinking about what he wants and needs and what he can or cannot do.

But he does nod eventually. "Then the answer to your question is 'yes'," Foggy tells him. "Yes, we are okay. Or we will be. The offer to disown him still stands, though."

Matt lowers his head and picks at the rim of the sweater. God, he looks so young and vulnerable without his glasses. "Why?" he asks. "Why do you--"

"Care, Foggy's mind supplies the rest of the question. Why do you care?

"You take care of Hell's Kitchen and everyone in it," he tells Matt, shrugging. He doesn't bother narrating. Matt knows. "So I figure, someone should take care of you in return."

Matt's head snaps back up and he purses his lips. "I don't need to be taken care of."

"I know," Foggy says. He thinks about what Jess said right before she left his apartment. "But that doesn't mean you don't deserve it."

They're silent for a moment. Foggy remembers the tea he left in the kitchenette, jumps off the couch and runs to check if he can still salvage it. It's not hot anymore, but it's warm enough, so he takes out the bag and adds a teaspoon of honey. He brings it to the living room and hands Matt the mug. Matt wraps his hands around it while Foggy sits back down next to him. He looks pensive.

"There's...something else," he says slowly and Foggy's blood runs cold. God, what now. "You--hugged me. Used to. You stopped."

"You didn't want it," Foggy reminds gently. "You told me to stop."

"I know." Matt sips the tea, most likely to postpone having to speak. "I'm sorry." He falls silent. Foggy patiently waits for him to continue. "It was--overwhelming. But I--liked--it. Can I--Can I take it back? That I want you to stop."

"You want me to hug you?"

"... Yes?"

Foggy starts laughing. He laughs and laughs, and Matt frowns at him, lost. Foggy takes the mug away from him and puts it on his coffee table, he catches Matt's wrists and tugs him close, so that Matt's half-leaning against him, with his head on Foggy's shoulder. "Snuggling totally counts as hugging."

A puff of hot air hits the skin of his neck and he realises that it's Matt, laughing under his breath. Matt scoops even closer and his hand grabs the material of Foggy's T-shirt, twists in it. Foggy brings his arm around Matt and presses him close, presses a kiss to the top of Matt's head and sighs.
"Ray," Matt says, tasting the word, seeing how it fits on his tongue. "Ray?"

They're lying across the coach, Foggy leaning against the armrest and Matt sprawled across him in a lazy embrace, Matt's head pressed to his breastbone, right under Foggy's chin. Déjà vu all over again. But the slightly better kind than the previous one.

"Raymond Connor," Foggy confirms. "From Maine."

"Maine?" Matt asks and doesn't bother to hide his distaste. A true New Yorker.

Foggy chuckles. "Yeah," he says. Then he adds, "you know, I broke his nose."

"Broke his nose?" Oh. Matt sounds borderline impressed. That's nice. "When did that happen?"

"Today, actually" Foggy tells him proudly. "When I ran after him. I punched him and broke his nose, he didn't see me coming. Or he did, but didn't think I could do him any damage. One of the two. Joke's on him."

Matt hums into the fabric of Foggy's T-shirt and settles more comfortably against him. One of Foggy's hands starts tracing abstract patterns on Matt's back.

"Ray," Foggy says suddenly, as something occurs to him. "He can do the same stuff you can, right?"

"Sort of," Matt murmurs. He's starting to sound sleepy. Maybe Foggy will backrub him to sleep. "Some things he can do better. Some things--not."

"What about your crazy polygraph thing? Can he do that?"

"Yes," Matt slurs. Yep, definitely on his way to dreamland. "Why d'you ask?"

Foggy's silent for a second. "I told him I'd kill him if he ever got close to you again," he says eventually. "Promised him that, in fact."

Matt makes a pained noise. "Foggy," he says, and sounds more awake than a second before, damn, why can't you ever keep your mouth shut, Nelson, this was a bad idea, "why did you--He'll kill you, he'll kill you, Foggy, I can't let that happen, I can't--"

"I don't think he will," Foggy murmurs. "He looked almost impressed after I told him that. And he said--"

"What?" Matt asks.

Foggy thinks about it for a minute. Whether Matt's right and Ray — Stick — Ray really can do the polygraph thing. Whether this meant that Ray thought Foggy was capable of killing. Whether he was.

"He said that he believed me."

Matt doesn't say anything to that, doesn't seem fazed by this, but for once Foggy knows that it's just a front, a mask of outward calm. Matt's grip on Foggy's T-shirt tightens and he's laying pressed so close that Foggy can feel his heartbeat speed up at this confession. It doesn't slow down until Matt falls asleep and Foggy finds himself wondering what Matt was thinking about that it made him so nervous.
"I would, you know," Foggy murmurs into Matt's hair. He's not sure if Matt registers that. It doesn’t really matter whether he does. It's true either way, he decides. He would. "For you, I will."

But that's a conversation for some other time, the great lengths Foggy would be — is — willing to go to ensure that Matt's fine, that Matt's safe and sound. Some other time, yes. But not today. Not now. For now Foggy closes his eyes and buries his nose in Matt's hair, breathes in the scent of rainwater still fresh on it and the scent of Matt, safe, safe and here, safe and so close.

For now.

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